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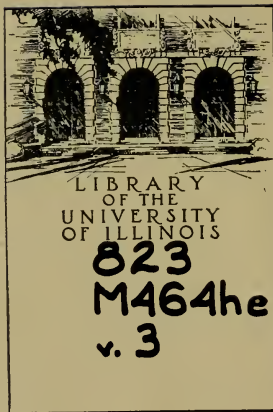
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# HENRY DUNBAR

THE STORY OF AN OUTCAST

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“LADY AUDLEY’S SECRET”

ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.



LONDON

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# HENRY DUNBAR.

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## CHAPTER I.

### A DISCOVERY AT THE LOUVRE.

WHILE Henry Dunbar sat in his lonely room at Maudesley Abbey, held prisoner by his broken leg, and waiting anxiously for the hour in which he should be allowed the privilege of taking his first experimental promenade upon crutches, Sir Philip Jocelyn and his beautiful young wife drove together on the crowded Boulevards of the French capital.

They had been southward, and had returned to the gayest capital in all the world at the time when that capital is at its best and brightest. They had returned to Paris for the early new

year; and, as this year happened fortunately to be ushered into existence by a sharp frost and a bright sunny sky, the boulevards were not the black rivers of mud and slush that they are apt to be in the first days of the infantine year. Prince Louis Napoleon Buonaparte was only First President as yet; and Paris was by no means the wonderful city of endless boulevards and palatial edifices that it has since grown to be under the master hand which rules and beautifies it, as a lover adorns his mistress. But it was not the less the most charming city in the universe; and Philip Jocelyn and his wife were as happy as two children in this paradise of brick and mortar.

They suited each other so well; they were never tired of each other's society, or at a standstill for want of something to say to each other. They were rather frivolous, perhaps; but a little frivolity may be pardoned in two people who were so very young and so entirely happy. Sir Philip may have been a little too much devoted to horses and dogs, and Laura may have been



a shade too enthusiastic upon the subject of new bonnets, and the jewelry in the Rue de la Paix. But if they idled a little just now, in this delicious honeymoon-time, when it was so sweet to be together always, from morning till night, driving in a sleigh with jingling bells upon the snowy roads in the Bois, sitting on the balcony at Meurice's at night, looking down into the long lamp-lit street and the misty gardens, where the trees were leafless and black against the dark blue sky, they meant to do their duty, and be useful to their fellow-creatures, when they were settled at Jocelyn's Rock. Sir Philip had half-a-dozen schemes for free schools, and model cottages with ovens that would bake every thing in the world, and chimneys that would never smoke. And Laura had her own pet plans. Was she not an heiress, and therefore specially sent into the world to give happiness to people who had been born without that pleasant appendage of a silver spoon in their infantine mouths? She meant to be scrupulously conscientious in the administration of her talents; and sometimes at church on a Sun-

day, when the sermon was particularly awakening, she mentally debated the serious question as to whether new bonnets, and a pair of Jouvin's gloves daily, were not sinful; but I think she decided that the new bonnets and gloves were, on the whole, a pardonable weakness, as being good for trade.

The Warwickshire baronet knew a good many people in Paris, and he and his bride received a very enthusiastic welcome from these old friends, who pronounced that Miladi Jocelyn was *charmante* and *la belle des belles*; and that Sir Jocelyn was the most fortunate of men in having discovered this gay, light-hearted girl amongst the prudish and pragmatical *meess* of the *brumeuse Angleterre*.

Laura made herself very much at home with her Parisian acquaintance; and in the grand house in the Rue Lepelletier many a glass was turned full upon the beautiful English bride with the *chevelure doré* and the violet-blue eyes.

One morning Laura told her husband, with a gay laugh, that she was going to victimise him;

but he was to promise to be patient and bear with her for once in a way.

“What is it you want me to do, my darling?”

“I want you to give me a long day in the Louvre. I want to see all the pictures—the modern pictures especially. I remember all the Rubenses, for I saw them three years ago, when I was staying in Paris with grandpapa. I like the modern pictures best, Philip; and I want you to tell me all about the artists, and what I ought to admire, and all that sort of thing.”

Sir Philip never refused his wife any thing; so he said yes; and Laura ran away to her dressing-room like a schoolgirl who has been pleading for a holiday, and has won her cause. She returned in a little more than ten minutes, in the freshest toilette, all pale shimmering blue, like the spring sky, with pearl-gray gloves and boots and parasol, and a bonnet that seemed made of azure butterflies.

It was drawing towards the close of this delightful honeymoon tour, and it was a bright sunshiny morning early in February; but February

in Paris is sometimes better than April in London.

Philip Jocelyn's work that morning was by no means light, for Laura was fond of pictures, in a frivolous amateurish kind of way; and she ran from one canvas to another, like a fickle-minded bee that is bewildered by the myriad blossoms of a boundless parterre. But she fixed upon a picture which she said she preferred to any thing she had seen in the gallery.

Philip Jocelyn was examining some pictures on the other side of the room when his wife made this discovery. She hurried to her husband immediately, and led him off to look at the picture. It was a peasant-girl's head, very exquisitely painted by a modern artist, and the baronet approved his wife's taste.

"How I wish you could get me a copy of that picture, Philip!" Laura said, entreatingly. "I should so like one to hang in my morning-room at Jocelyn's Rock. I wonder who painted that lovely face?"

There was a young artist hard at work at

his easel, copying a large devotional subject that hung near the picture Laura admired. Sir Philip asked this gentleman if he knew the name of the artist who had painted the peasant-girl.

“Ah, but yes, monsieur!” the painter answered, with animated politeness; “it is the work of one of my friends; a young Englishman, of a renown almost universal in Paris.”

“And his name, monsieur?”

“He calls himself Kerstall, Frederick Kerstall; he is the son of an old monsieur, who calls himself also Kerstall, and who had much of celebrity in England it is many years.”

“Kerstall!” exclaimed Laura, suddenly; “Mr. Kerstall! why, it was a Mr. Kerstall who painted papa’s portrait; I have heard grandpapa say so again and again; and he took it away to Italy with him, promising to bring it back to London when he returned, after a year or two of study. And, oh, Philip, I should so like to see this old Mr. Kerstall; because, you know, he may have kept papa’s portrait until this very day, and I should so like to have a picture of my father as

he was when he was young, and before the troubles of a long life altered him," Laura said, rather mournfully.

She turned to the French artist presently, and asked him where the elder Mr. Kerstall lived, and if there was any possibility of seeing him.

The painter shrugged up his shoulders, and pursed up his mouth, thoughtfully.

"But, madame," he said, "this Monsieur Kerstall's father is very old, and he has ceased to paint it is long time. They have said that he is even a little imbecile, that he does not remember himself of the most common events of his life. But there are some others who say that his memory has not altogether failed, and that he is still enough harshly critical towards the works of others."

The Frenchman might have run on much longer upon this subject, but Laura was too impatient to be polite. She interrupted him by asking for Mr. Kerstall's address.

The artist took out one of his own cards, and wrote the required address in pencil.



“It is upon the other side of the river, madame, in the Rue Cailoux, over the office of a Parisian journal,” he said, as he handed the card to Laura. “I don’t think you will have any difficulty in finding the house.”

Laura thanked the French artist, and then took her husband’s arm and walked away with him.

“I don’t care about looking at any more pictures to-day, Philip,” she said; “but, oh, I do wish you would take me to this Mr. Kerstall’s studio at once! You will be doing me such a favour, Philip, if you’ll say yes.”

“When did I ever say no to any thing you asked me, Laura? We’ll go to Mr. Kerstall immediately, if you like. But why are you so anxious to see this old portrait of your father, my dear?”

“Because I want to see what he was before he went to India. I want to see what he was when he was bright and young, before the world had hardened him. Ah, Philip, since we have known and loved each other, it seems to me as if

I had no thought or care for any one in all this wide world except yourself. But before that time I was very unhappy about my father. I had expected that he would be so fond of me. I had so built upon his return to England, thinking that we should be nearer and dearer to each other than any father and daughter ever were before. I had thought all this, Philip; night after night I had dreamt the same dream,—the bright happy dream in which my father came home to me, the fond foolish dream in which I felt his strong arms folded round me, and his true heart beating against my own. But when he did come at last, it seemed to me as if this father was a man of stone; his white fixed face repelled me; his cold hard voice turned my blood to ice. I was frightened of him, Philip; I was frightened of my own father; and little by little we grew to shun each other, till at last we met like strangers, or something worse than strangers; for I have seen my father look at me with an expression of absolute horror in his stern cruel eyes. Can you wonder, then, that I want to see what he was in his youth?

I shall learn to love him, perhaps, if I can see the smiling image of his lost youth."

Laura said all this in a very low voice as she walked with her husband through the splendid galleries of the Louvre. She walked very fast; for she was as eager as a child who is intent upon some scheme of pleasure.

## CHAPTER II.

### LOOKING FOR THE PORTRAIT.

THE Rue Cailoux was a very quiet little street—a narrow, winding street, with tall shabby-looking houses, and untidy little greengrocers' shops peeping out here and there.

The pavement suggested the idea that there had just been an outbreak of the populace, and that the stones had been ruthlessly torn up to serve in the construction of barricades, and only very carelessly put down again. It was a street which seemed to have been built with a view to achieving the largest amount of inconvenience out of the smallest materials; and looked at in this light the Rue Cailoux was a triumph: it was a street in which Parisian drivers clacked their whips to a running accompaniment of imprecations: it was a street in which you met dirty porters carrying six

feet of highly-baked bread, and shrill old women with wonderful bandannas bound about their grisly heads: but above all, it was a street in which you were so shaken and jostled, and bumped and startled, by the ups and downs of the pavement, that you had very little leisure to notice the distinctive features of the neighbourhood.

The house in which Mr. Kerstall the English artist lived was a gloomy-looking building with a dingy archway, beneath which Sir Philip Jocelyn and his wife alighted.

There was a door under this archway, and there was a yard beyond it, with the door of another house opening upon it, and ranges of black curtainless windows looking down upon it, and an air of dried herbs, green-stuff, chickens in the moulting stage, and old women, generally pervading it. The door which belonged to Mr. Kerstall's house, or rather the house in which Mr. Kerstall lived in common with a colony of unknown number and various avocations, was open, and Sir Philip and his wife went into the hall.

There was no such thing as a porter or por-

tress ; but a stray old woman, hovering under the archway, informed Philip Jocelyn that Mr. Kerstall was to be found on the second story. So Laura and her husband ascended the stairs, which were bare of any covering except dirt, and went on mounting through comparative darkness, past the office of the Parisian journal, till they came to a very dingy black door.

Philip knocked, and, after a considerable interval, the door was opened by another old woman, tidier and cleaner than the old women who pervaded the yard, but looking like a very near relation to those ladies.

Philip inquired in French for the senior Mr. Kerstall ; and the old woman told him, very much through her nose, that Mr. Kerstall father saw no one ; but that Mr. Kerstall son was at his service.

Philip Jocelyn said, that in that case he would be glad to see Mr. Kerstall junior ; upon which the old woman ushered the baronet and his wife into a saloon, distinguished by an air of faded splendour, and in which the French clocks and



ormolu candelabras were in the proportion of two to one to the chairs and tables.

Sir Philip gave his card to the old woman, and she carried it into the adjoining chamber, whence there issued a gush of tobacco-smoke, as the door between the two rooms was opened, and then shut again.

In less than three minutes by the minute-hand of the only one of the ormolu clocks which made any pretence of going, the door was opened again, and a burly-looking, middle-aged gentleman, with a very black beard, and a dirty holland blouse all smeared with smudges of oil-colour, appeared upon the threshold of the adjoining chamber, surrounded by a cloud of tobacco-smoke—like a heathen deity, or a good-tempered-looking African genii newly escaped from his bottle.

This was Mr. Kerstall junior. He introduced himself to Sir Philip, and waited to hear what that gentleman required of him.

Philip Jocelyn explained his business, and told the painter how, more than five-and-thirty years before, the portrait of Henry Dunbar, only son of

Percival Dunbar the great banker, had been painted by Mr. Michael Kerstall, at that time a fashionable artist.

“Five-and-thirty years ago!” said the painter, pulling thoughtfully at his beard; “five-and-thirty years ago! that’s a very long time, my lord, and I’m afraid it’s not likely my father will remember the circumstance; for I regret to say that he is slow to remember the events of a few days past. His memory has been failing a long time. You wish to know the fate of this portrait of Mr. Dunbar, I think you said?”

Laura answered this question, although it had been addressed to her husband.

“Yes, we want to see the picture, if possible,” she said; “Mr. Dunbar is my father, and there is no other portrait of him in existence. I do so want to see this one, and to obtain possession of it, if it is possible for me to do so.”

“And you are of opinion that my father took the picture to Italy with him when he left England more than five-and-thirty years ago?”

“Yes; I’ve heard my grandfather say so. He

lost sight of Mr. Kerstall, and could never obtain any tidings of the picture. But I hope that, late as it is, we may be more fortunate now. You do not think the picture has been destroyed, do you?" Laura asked, eagerly.

"Well," the artist answered, doubtfully, "I should be inclined to fear that the portrait may have been painted out: and yet, by the by, as the picture belonged by right to Mr. Percival Dunbar, and not to my father, that circumstance may have preserved it uninjured through all these years. My father has a heap of unframed canvases, inches thick in dust, and littering every corner of his room. Mr. Dunbar's portrait may be amongst those."

"Oh, I should be so very much obliged if you would allow me to examine those pictures," said Laura.

"You think you would recognise the portrait?"

"Yes; surely I could not fail to do so? I know my father's face so well as it is, that I must certainly have some knowledge of it as it was five-

and-thirty years ago, however much he may have altered in the interval. Pray, Mr. Kerstall, oblige me by letting me see the pictures."

"I should be very churlish were I to refuse to do so," the painter answered, good-naturedly. "I will just go and see if my father is able to receive visitors. He has been a voluntary exile from England for the last five-and-thirty years, so I fear he will have forgotten the name of Dunbar; but he may by chance be able to give us some slight assistance."

Mr. Kerstall left his visitors for about ten minutes, and at the end of that time he returned to say that his father was quite ready to receive Sir Philip and Lady Jocelyn.

"I mentioned the name of Dunbar to him," the painter said; "but he remembers nothing. He has been painting a little this morning, and is in very high spirits about his work. It pleases him to handle the brushes, though his hand is terribly shaky, and he can scarcely hold the palette."

The artist led the way to a large room, comfortably, but plainly, furnished, and heated to a

pitch of suffocation by a stove. There was a bed in a curtained alcove at the end of the apartment; an easel stood near the large window; and the proprietor of the chamber sat in a cushioned arm-chair close to the suffocating stove.

Michael Kerstall was an old man, who looked even older than he was. He was a picturesque-looking old man, with long white hair dropping down over his coat-collar, and a black-velvet skull-cap upon his head. He was a cheerful old man, and life seemed very pleasant to him; for Frenchmen have a habit of honouring their fathers and mothers, and Mr. Frederick Kerstall was a naturalised citizen of the French republic.

The old man nodded and smiled and chuckled as Sir Philip and Laura were presented to him, and pointed with a courtly grace to the chairs which his son set for his guests.

“You want to see my pictures, sir? Ah, yes; to be sure, to be sure! The modern school of painting, sir, is something marvellous to an old man, sir; an old man who remembers Sir Thomas Lawrence—ay, sir, I had the honour to know him

intimately. No pre-Raphaelite theories in those days, sir; no figures cut out of coloured paste-board and glued on to the canvas; no green trees and vermilion draperies, and chocolate-coloured streaks across an ultramarine back-ground, sir; and I'm told the young people call that a sky. No pointed chins, and angular knees and elbows, and frizzy red hair—red, sir, and as frizzy as a blackamoor's—and I'm told the young people call that female beauty. No, sir; nothing of that sort in *my* day. There was a French painter in my day, sir, called David, and there was an English painter in my day called Lawrence; and they painted ladies and gentlemen, sir; and they instituted a gentlemanly school, sir. And you put a crimson curtain behind your subject, and you put a bran-new hat, or a roll of paper, in his right hand, and you thrust his left hand in his waist-coat—the best black satin, sir, with strong light in the texture—and you made your subject look like a gentleman. Yes, sir, if he was a chimney-sweep when he went into your studio, he went out of it a gentleman."



The old man would have gone on talking for any length of time, for pre-Raphaelitism was his favourite antipathy; and the black-bearded gentleman standing behind his chair was an enthusiastic member of the pre-Raphaelite brotherhood.

Mr. Kerstall senior seemed so thoroughly in possession of all his faculties while he held forth upon modern art, that Laura began to hope his memory could scarcely be so much impaired as his son had represented it to be.

“When you painted portraits in England, Mr. Kerstall,” she said, “before you went to Italy, you painted a likeness of my father, Henry Dunbar, who was then a young man. Do you remember that circumstance?”

Laura asked this question very hopefully; but to her surprise, Mr. Kerstall took no notice whatever of her inquiry, but went rambling on about the degeneracy of modern art.

“I am told there is a young man called Mil-lais, sir, and another young man called Holman Hunt, sir,—positive boys, sir; actually very little

more than boys, sir;—and I am given to understand, sir, that when these young men's works are exhibited at the Royal Academy in London, sir, people crowd round them, and go raving mad about them; while a gentlemanly portrait of a county member, with a Corinthian pillar and a crimson curtain, gets no more attention than if it was a bishop's half-length of blank canvas. I am told so, sir, and I am obliged to believe it, sir."

Poor Laura listened very impatiently to all this talk about painters and their pictures. But Mr. Kerstall the younger perceived her anxiety, and came to her relief.

"Lady Jocelyn would very much like to see the pictures you have scattered about in this room, my dear father," he said, "if you have no objection to our turning them over?"

The old man chuckled and nodded.

"You'll find 'em gentlemanly," he said; "you'll find 'em all more or less gentlemanly."

"You're sure you don't remember painting the portrait of a Mr. Dunbar?" Mr. Kerstall the

younger said earnestly, bending over his father's chair as he spoke. "Try again, father—try to remember—Henry Dunbar, the son of Percival Dunbar the great banker."

Mr. Kerstall senior, who never left off smiling, nodded and chuckled, and scratched his head, and seemed to plunge into a depth of profound thought.

Laura began to hope again.

"I remember painting Sir Jasper Rivington, who was Lord Mayor in the year—bless my heart! how the dates do slip out of my mind, to be sure!—I remember painting *him*, in his robes too! yes, sir—by gad, sir, his official robes. He'd like me to have painted him looking out of the window of his state-coach, sir, bowing to the populace on Ludgate Hill, with the dome of St. Paul's in the back-ground; but I told him the notion wasn't practicable, sir; I told him it couldn't be done, sir; I——"

Laura looked despairingly at Mr. Kerstall the younger.

"May we see the pictures?" she asked. "I

am sure that I shall recognise my father's portrait, if by any chance it should be amongst them."

"We will set to work at once, then," the artist said briskly. "We're going to look at your pictures, father."

Unframed canvases, and unfinished sketches on millboard, were lying about the room in every direction, piled against the wall, heaped on side-tables, and stowed out of the way upon shelves, and every where the dust lay thick upon them.

"It was quite a chamber of horrors," Mr. Kerstall the younger said, gaily: for it was here that he banished his own failures; his sketches for his pictures that were to be painted upon some future occasion; carelessly-drawn groups that he meant some day to improve upon; finished pictures that he had been unable to sell; and all the other useless litter of an artist's studio.

There were a great many dingy performances of Mr. Kerstall senior; very classical, and extremely uninteresting; studies from the life, gray and chalky and muscular, with here and there a

knotty-looking foot or a lumpy arm, in the most unpleasant phases of foreshortening. There were a good many portraits, gentlemanly to the last degree; but poor Laura looked in vain for the face she wanted to see—the hard cold face, as she fancied it must have been in youth.

There were portraits of elderly ladies with stately head-gear, and simpering young ladies with innocent, short-waisted bodices, and flowers held gracefully in their white-muslin draperies; there were portraits of stern clerical grandees, and parliamentary non-celebrities, with popular bills rolled up in their hands, ready to be laid upon the speaker's table, and with a tight look about the lips, that seemed to say the member was prepared to carry his motion, or perish on the floor of the House.

There were only a few portraits of young men of military aspect, looking fiercely over regulation stocks, and with forked lightning and little pyramids of cannon-balls in the background.

Laura sighed heavily at last, for amongst all these portraits there was not one which in the

least possible degree recalled the hard handsome face with which she was familiar.

"I'm afraid my father's picture has been lost or destroyed," she said, mournfully.

But Mr. Kerstall would not allow this.

I have said that it was Laura's peculiar privilege to bewitch every body with whom she came in contact, and to transform them, for the nonce, into her willing slaves, eager to go through fire and water in the service of this beautiful creature, whose eyes and hair were like blue skies and golden sunshine, and carried light and summer wherever they went.

The black-bearded artist in the paint-smeared holland blouse was in no manner proof against Lady Jocelyn's fascinations.

He had well-nigh suffocated himself with dust half-a-dozen times already in her service, and was ready to inhale as much more dust if she desired him so to do.

"We won't give it up just yet, Lady Jocelyn," he said, cheerfully; "there's a couple of shelves still to examine. Suppose we try shelf

number one, and see if we can find Mr. Henry Dunbar up there."

Mr. Kerstall junior mounted upon a chair, and brought down another heap of canvases, dirtier than any previous collection. He brought these to a table by the side of his father's easel, and one by one he wiped them clean with a large ragged silk handkerchief, and then placed them on the easel.

The easel stood in the full light of the broad window. The day was bright and clear, and there was no lack of light, therefore, upon the portraits.

Mr. Kerstall senior began to be quite interested in his son's proceedings, and contemplated the younger man's operations with a perpetual chuckling and nodding of the head, that were expressive of unmitigated satisfaction.

"Yes, they're gentlemanly," the old man mumbled; "nobody can deny that they're gentlemanly. They may make a cabal against me in Trafalgar Square, and decline to hang 'em; but they can't say my pictures are ungentlemanly.



No, no. Take a basin of water and a sponge, Fred, and wash the dust off. It pleases me to see 'em again—yes, by gad, sir, it pleases me to see 'em again!"

Mr. Frederick Kerstall obeyed his father, and the pictures brightened wonderfully under the influence of a damp sponge. It was rather a slow operation; but Laura was bent upon seeing every picture, and Philip Jocelyn waited patiently enough until the inspection should be concluded.

The old man brightened up as much as his paintings, and began presently to call out the names of the subjects.

"The member for Slopton-on-the-Tees," he said, as his son placed a portrait on the easel; "that was a presentation picture, but the subscriptions were never paid up, and the committee left the portrait upon my hands. I don't remember the name of the member, because my memory isn't quite so good as it used to be; but the borough was Slopton-on-the-Tees—Slopton—yes, yes, I remember that."

The younger Kerstall took away the member



for Slopton, and put another picture on the easel. But this was like the rest; the pictured face bore no trace of resemblance to that face for which Laura was looking.

“I remember him too,” the old man cried, with a triumphant chuckle. “He was an officer in the East-India Company’s service. I remember him; a dashing young fellow he was too. He had the picture painted for his mother; paid me a third of the money at the first sitting; never paid me a sixpence afterwards; and went off to India, promising to send me a bill of exchange for the balance by the next mail; but I never heard any more of him.”

Mr. Kerstall removed the Indian officer, and substituted another portrait.

Sir Philip, who was sitting near the window, looking on rather listlessly, cried—

“What a handsome face!”

*It was* a handsome face—a bright young face, which smiled haughty defiance at the world—a splendid face, with perhaps a shade of insolence in the curve of the upper lip, sharply defined

under a thick auburn moustache, with pointed ends that curled fiercely upwards. It was such a face as might have belonged to the favourite of a powerful king; the face of the Cinq Mars, on the very summit of his giddy eminence, with a hundred pairs of boots in his dressing-room, and quiet Cardinal Richelieu watching silently for the day of his doom. English Buckingham may have worn the same insolent smile upon his lips, the same bright triumph in his glance, when he walked up to the throne of Louis the Just, with the pearls and diamonds dropping from his garments as he went along, and with forbidden love beaming on him out of Austrian Anne's blue eyes. It was such a face as could only belong to some high favourite of fortune, defiant of all mankind in the consciousness of his own supreme advantages.

But Laura Jocelyn shook her head as she looked at the picture.

"I begin to despair of finding my father's portrait," she said; "I have seen nothing at all like it yet."

The old man lifted up his bony hand, and pointed to the picture on the easel.

“That’s the best thing I ever did,” he said, “the very best thing I ever did. It was exhibited in the Academy six-and-thirty years ago—yes, by ‘gad, sir, six-and-thirty years ago! and the papers mentioned it very favourably, sir; but the man who commissioned it, sent it back to me for alteration. The expression of the face didn’t please him; but he paid me two hundred guineas for the picture, so I had no reason to complain; and if I’d remained in England, the connexion might have been very advantageous to me; for they were rich City people, sir—enormously wealthy—something in the banking-line, and the name, the name—let me see—let me see!”

The old man tapped his forehead thoughtfully.

“I remember,” he added, presently; “it was a great name in the City—it was a well-known name—Dun—Dunbar—Dunbar.”

“Why, father, that was the very name I was asking you about, half-an-hour ago!”

“I don’t remember your asking me any such

thing," the old man answered, rather snappishly ; "but I do know that the picture on that easel is the portrait of Mr. Dunbar's only son."

Mr. Kerstall the younger looked at Laura Jocelyn, fully expecting to see her face beaming with satisfaction ; but, to his own surprise, she looked more disappointed than ever.

"Your poor father's memory deceives him," she said, in a low voice ; "that is not my father's portrait."

"No," said Philip Jocelyn ; "that was never the likeness of Henry Dunbar."

Mr. Frederick Kerstall shrugged his shoulders.

"I told you as much," he murmured, confidentially. "I told you my poor father's memory was gone. Would you like to see the rest of the pictures?"

"Oh, yes, if you do not mind all this trouble."

Mr. Kerstall brought down another heap of unframed canvases from shelf number two. Some of these were fancy heads, and some sketches for grand historical pictures. There were only about four portraits, and not one of them bore the

faintest likeness to the face that Laura wanted to see.

The old man chuckled as his son exhibited the pictures, and every now and then volunteered some scrap of information about these various works of art, to which his son listened patiently and respectfully.

So at last the inspection was ended. The baronet and his wife thanked the artist very warmly for his politeness, and Philip gave him a commission for a replica of the picture which Laura had admired in the Louvre. Mr. Frederick Kerstall conducted his guests down the dingy staircase, and saw them to the hired carriage that was waiting under the archway.

And this was all that came of Laura Jocelyn's search for her father's portrait.

## CHAPTER III.

### MARGARET'S LETTER.

LIFE seemed very blank to Clement Austin when he returned to London a day or two after Margaret Wilmot's departure from the Reindeer. He told his mother that he and his betrothed had parted; but he would tell no more.

"I have been cruelly disappointed, mother, and the subject is very bitter to me," he said; and Mrs. Austin had not the courage to ask any further questions.

"I suppose I *must* be satisfied, Clement," she said. "It seems to me as if we had been living lately in an atmosphere of enigmas. But I can afford to be contented, Clement, so long as I have you with me."

Clement went back to London. His life seemed to have altogether slipped away from him,

and he felt like an old man who has lost all the bright chances of existence ; the hope of domestic happiness and a pleasant home ; the opportunity of a useful career and an honoured name ; and who has nothing more to do but to wait patiently till the slow current of his empty life drops into the sea of death.

“ I feel so old, mother,” he said, sometimes ;  
“ I feel so old.”

To a man who has been accustomed to be busy there is no affliction so intolerable as idleness.

Clement Austin felt this, and yet he had no heart to begin life again, though tempting offers came to him from great commercial houses, whose chiefs were eager to secure the well-known cashier of Messrs. Dunbar, Dunbar, and Balderby's establishment.

Poor Clement could not go into the world yet. His disappointment had been too bitter, and he had no heart to go out amongst hard men of business, and begin life again. He wasted hour after hour, and day after day, in gloomy thoughts about the past. What a dupe he had been ! what



a shallow, miserable fool! for he had believed as firmly in Margaret Wilmot's truth, as he had believed in the blue sky above his head.

One day a new idea flashed into Clement Austin's mind; an idea which placed Margaret Wilmot's character even in a worse light than that in which she had revealed herself in her own confession.

There could be only one reason for the sudden change in her sentiments about Henry Dunbar: the millionaire had bribed her to silence! This girl, who seemed the very incarnation of purity and candour, had her price, perhaps, as well as other people, and Henry Dunbar had bought the silence of his victim's daughter.

"It was the knowledge of this business that made her shrink away from me that night when she told me that she was a contaminated creature, unfit to be the associate of an honest man. Oh, Margaret, Margaret! poverty must indeed be a bitter school if it has prepared you for such degradation as this!"

The longer Clement thought of the subject, the



more certainly he arrived at the conclusion that Margaret Wilmot had been either bribed or frightened into silence by Henry Dunbar. It might be that the banker had terrified this unhappy girl by some awful threat that had preyed upon her mind, and driven her from the man who loved her, whom she loved perhaps, in spite of those heartless words which she had spoken in the bitter hour of their parting.

Clement could not thoroughly believe in the baseness of the woman he had trusted. Again and again he went over the same ground, trying to find some lurking circumstance, no matter how unlikely in its nature, which should explain and justify Margaret's conduct.

Sometimes in his dreams he saw the familiar face looking at him with pensive, half-reproachful glances; and then a dark figure that was strange to him came between him and that gentle shadow, and thrust the vision away with a ruthless hand. At last, by dint of going over the ground again and again, always pleading Margaret's cause against the stern witness of cruel facts, Clement came

to look upon the girl's innocence as a settled thing.

There was falsehood and treachery in the business, but Margaret Wilmot was neither false nor treacherous. There was a mystery, and Henry Dunbar was at the bottom of it.

"It seems as if the spirit of the murdered man troubled our lives, and cried to us for vengeance," Clement thought. "There will be no peace for us until the secret of the deed done in the grove near Winchester has been brought to light."

This thought, working night and day in Clement Austin's brain, gave rise to a fixed resolve. Before he went back to the quiet routine of life, he set himself a task to accomplish, and that task was the solution of the Winchester mystery.

On the very day after this resolution took a definite form, Clement received a letter from Margaret Wilmot. The sight of the well-known writing gave him a shock of mingled surprise and hope, and his fingers were faintly tremulous as they tore open the envelope. The letter was carefully worded, and very brief.

*“ You are a good man, Mr. Austin,” Margaret wrote; “ and though you have reason to despise me, I do not think you will refuse to receive my testimony in favour of another who has been falsely suspected of a terrible crime, and who has need of justification. Henry Dunbar was not the murderer of my father. As Heaven is my witness, this is the truth, and I know it to be the truth. Let this knowledge content you, and allow the secret of the murder to remain for ever a mystery upon earth. God knows the truth, and has doubtless punished the wretched sinner who was guilty of that crime, as He punishes every other sinner, sooner or later, in the course of His ineffable wisdom. Leave the sinner, wherever he may be hidden, to the judgment of God, which penetrates every hiding-place; and forget that you have ever known me, or my miserable story.*

*“ MARGARET WILMOT.”*

Even this letter did not shake Clement Austin's resolution.

“ No, Margaret,” he thought; “ even your pleading shall not turn me from my purpose. Besides, how can I tell in what manner this letter

may have been written? It may have been written at Henry Dunbar's dictation, and under coercion. Be it as it may, the mystery of the Winchester murder shall be set at rest, if patience or intelligence can solve the enigma. No mystery shall separate me from the woman I love."

Clement put Margaret's letter in his pocket, and went straight to Scotland Yard, where he obtained an introduction to a business-like looking man, short and stoutly built, with close-cropped hair, very little shirt-collar, a shabby black satin stock, and a coat buttoned tightly across the chest. He was a man whose appearance was something between the aspect of a shabby-genteel half-pay captain and an unlucky stockbroker: but Clement liked the steady light of his small gray eyes, and the decided expression of his thin lips and prominent chin.

The detective business happened to be rather dull just now. There was nothing stirring but a Bank-of-England forgery case: and Mr. Carter informed Clement that there were more cats in

Scotland Yard than could find mice to kill. Under these circumstances, Mr. Carter was able to enter into Clement's views, and sequester himself for a short period for the more deliberate investigation of the Winchester business.

"I'll look up a file of newspapers, and run my eye over the details of the case," said the detective. "I was away in Glasgow, hunting up the particulars of the great Scotch-plaid robberies, all last summer, and I can't say I remember much of what was done in the Wilmot business. Mr. Dunbar himself offered a reward for the apprehension of the guilty party, didn't he?"

"Yes; but that might be a blind."

"Oh, of course it might; but then, on the other hand, it mightn't. You must always look at these sort of things from every point of view. Start with a conviction of the man's guilt, and you'll go hunting up evidence to bolster that conviction. My plan is to begin at the beginning; learn the alphabet of the case, and work up into the syntax and prosody."

"I should like to help you in this business,"

Clement Austin said; "for I have a vital interest in the issue of the case."

"You're rather more likely to hinder than help, sir," Mr. Carter answered, with a smile; "but you're welcome to have a finger in the pie if you like, as long as you'll engage to hold your tongue when I tell you."

Clement promised to be the very spirit of discretion. The detective called upon him two days after the interview at Scotland Yard.

"I've read-up the Wilmot case, sir," Mr. Carter said; "and I think the next best thing I can do is to see the scene of the murder. I shall start for Winchester to-morrow morning."

"Then I'll go with you," Clement said promptly.

"So be it, Mr. Austin. You may as well bring your cheque-book while you're about it, for this sort of thing is apt to come rather expensive."

## CHAPTER IV.

NOTES FROM A JOURNAL KEPT BY CLEMENT AUSTIN  
DURING HIS JOURNEY TO WINCHESTER.

“IF I had been a happy man, with no great trouble weighing upon my mind, and giving its own dull colour to every event of my life, I think I might have been considerably entertained by the society of Mr. Carter the detective. The man had an enthusiastic love of his profession; and if there is any thing degrading in the office, that degradation had in no way affected him. It may be that Mr. Carter’s knowledge of his own usefulness was sufficient to preserve his self-respect. If, in the course of his duty, he had unpleasant things to do: if he had to affect friendly acquaintanceship with the man whom he was hunting to the gallows: if he was called upon to worm-out chance clues to guilty secrets in the



careless confidence that grows out of a friendly glass: if at times he had to stoop to acts which, in other men, would be branded as shameful and treacherous,—he knew that he did his duty, and that society could not hold together unless some such men as himself—clear-headed, brave, resolute, and unscrupulous in the performance of unpleasant work—were willing to act as watchdogs for the protection of the general fold, and to the terror of savage and marauding beasts.

“Mr. Carter told me a great deal of his experience, during our journey down to Winchester. I listened to him, and understood what he said to me; but I could not take any interest in his conversation. I could not remember any thing, or think of any thing, except the mystery which separates me from the woman I love.

“The more I think of this, the stronger becomes my conviction that I have not been the dupe of a heartless or mercenary woman. Margaret has not acted as a free agent. She has paid the penalty of her determination to force herself into the presence of Henry Dunbar. By some in-



explicable means, by some masterpiece of villany and cunning, this man has induced his victim's daughter to become the champion of his innocence, instead of the denouncer of his guilt.

“There must be some hopeless entanglement, some cruel involvement, by reason of which Margaret is compelled to falsify her nature, and sacrifice her own happiness as well as mine. When she left me that day at Shorncliffe, she suffered as cruelly as I could suffer : I know now that it was so. But I was blinded then by pride and anger : I was conscious of nothing but my own wrongs.

“Three times in the course of my journey from London to Winchester I have taken Margaret's strange letter from my pocket-book, and have read the familiar lines, with the idea of putting entire confidence in my companion, and placing the letter in his hands. But in order to do this I must tell him the story of my love and my disappointment ; and I cannot bring myself to do that. It may be that this man could discover hidden meanings in Margaret's words

—meanings that are utterly dark to me. I suppose the science of detection includes the power to guess at thoughts that lurk behind expressions which are simple enough in themselves.

\* \* \* \* \*

“We got into Winchester at twelve o’clock in the day; and Mr. Carter proposed that we should come straight to the George Hotel, at which house Henry Dunbar stayed after the murder in the Grove.

“‘We can’t do better than put up at the hotel where the suspected party was stopping at the time of the event we’re looking up,’ Mr. Carter said to me, as we strolled away from the station, after giving our small amount of luggage into the care of a porter; ‘we shall pick up all manner of information in a promiscuous way, if we’re staying in the house; little bits that will seem nothing at all till you put them all together, and begin at the beginning, and read them off the right way. Now, Mr. Austin, there’s a few words I must say before

we begin business; for you're an amateur at this kind of work, and it's just possible that, with the best intentions, you may go and spoil my game. Now I've undertaken this affair, and I want to go through with it conscientiously; under which circumstances I'm obliged to be candid. Are you willing to act under orders?

"I told Mr. Carter that I was perfectly willing to obey his orders in every thing, so long as what I did helped the purpose of our journey.

"That's all square and pleasant,' he answered; 'so now for it. First and foremost, you and me are two gentlemen that have got more time than we know what to do with, and more money than we know how to spend. We've heard a great deal about the fishing round Winchester; and we've come down to spend an idle week or so, and have a look about the place against next summer; and if we like the looks of the place, why, we shall come and spend the summer months at the George, where we find the accommodation in

general, and say the fried soles, or the mock-turtle, in particular, better than at any hotel in the three kingdoms. That's number one; and that places us at once on the footing of good customers, who are likely to be better customers. This will square the landlord and the waiters, and there's nothing they can tell us that they won't tell us willingly. So much for the first place. Now point number two is, that we know nothing whatever of the man that was murdered. We know Mr. Dunbar because he's a great man, a public character, and all that sort of thing. We did see something about the murder in the papers, but didn't take any interest in it. This will draw out the landlord or the waiters, as the case may be, and we shall get the history of the murder, with all that was said, and done, and thought, and suspected, and hinted, and whispered about it. When the landlord and the waiters have talked about it a good deal, we begin to warm up, and take a kind of morbid interest in the business; and then, little by

little, *I* put in my questions, and keep on putting 'em till every bit of information upon this particular subject is picked away as clean as the meat that's torn off a bone by a hungry dog. Now you'd like to help me in this business, I daresay, Mr. Austin; and if you would, I think I can hit upon a plan by which you might make yourself uncommonly useful.'

"I told my companion that I was very anxious to give him any help I could afford, however insignificant that help might be.

" 'Then I'll tell you what you can do. I shan't go at the subject we want to talk about at once; because, if I did, I should betray my interest in the business and spoil my game; not that any body would try to thwart me, you understand, if they knew that I was detective officer Henry Carter, of Scotland Yard. They'd be all on the *qui vive* directly they found out who I was and what I was after, and they'd try to help me. That's what they'd do; and Tom would tell me this, and Dick would explain that, and Harry would remember the other; and among them

they'd contrive to muddle the clearest head that ever worked a difficult problem in criminal Euclid. My game is to keep myself dark, and get all the light I can from other people. I shan't ask any leading question, but I shall wait quietly till the murder of Joseph Wilmot crops up in the conversation; and I don't suppose I shall have to wait long. Your business will be easy enough. You'll have letters to write, you will; and as soon as ever you hear me and the landlord, or me and the waiter, as the case may be, working round to the murder, you'll take out your desk and begin to write.'

" 'You want me to take notes of the conversation,' I said.

" 'You've hit it. You won't appear to take any interest in the talk about Henry Dunbar and the murder of his valet. You'll be altogether wrapped up in those letters of yours, which must be written before the London post goes out; but you'll contrive to write down every word that's said by the people at the George bearing upon the business we're hunting up. Never mind my



questions ; don't write them down, for they're of no account. Write down the answers as plain as you can. They'll come all of a heap, or anyhow ; but that's no matter. It'll be my business to sort 'em, and put 'em ship-shape afterwards. You just keep your mouth shut, and take notes, Mr. Austin ; that's all you've got to do.'

" I promised to do this to the best of my ability. We were close to the George by this time, and I could not help thinking of that bright summer's day upon which Henry Dunbar and his victim had driven into Winchester on the first stage of a journey which one of them was never to finish. The conviction of the banker's guilt had so grown upon me since that scene in St. Gundolph Lane, that I thought of the man now almost as if he had been fairly tried and deliberately found guilty. It surprised me when the detective talked of his guilt as open to question, and yet to be proved. In my mind Henry Dunbar stood self-condemned, by the evidence of his own conduct, as the murderer of his old servant Joseph Wilmot.



“The weather was bleak and windy, and there were very few wanderers in the hilly High Street of Winchester. We were received with very courteous welcome at the George, and were conducted to a comfortable sitting-room upon the first-floor, with windows looking out upon the street. Two bed-rooms in the vicinity of the sitting-room were assigned to us. I ordered dinner for six o'clock, having ascertained that hour to be agreeable to Mr. Carter, who was slowly removing his wrappings, and looking deliberately at every separate article in the room; as if he fancied there might be some scrap of information to be picked up from a window-blind, or a coal-scuttle, or lurking mysteries hidden in a sideboard-drawer. I have no doubt the habit of observation was so strong upon this man that he observed the most insignificant things involuntarily.

“It was a very dull unpleasant day, and I was glad to draw my chair to the fire and make myself comfortable, while the waiter went to fetch a bottle of soda-water and sixpenn'orth of ‘best

French' for my companion, who was walking about the room with his hands in his pockets, and his grizzled eyebrows knotted together.

“ The reward which Government had offered for the arrest of Joseph Wilmot's murderer was the legitimate price usually bidden for the head of an assassin. The Government had offered to pay one hundred pounds to any person or persons who should give such information as would lead to the apprehension of the guilty party or parties. I had promised Mr. Carter that I would give him another hundred pounds on my own account if he succeeded in solving the mystery of Joseph Wilmot's death. The reward at stake was therefore two hundred pounds; and this was a pretty high stake, Mr. Carter told me, as the detective business went. I had given him my written engagement to pay the hundred pounds upon the day of the murderer's arrest, and I was very well able to do so without fear of being compelled to ask help of my mother; for I had saved upwards of a thousand pounds during my twelve years' service in the house of Dunbar, Dunbar, and Balderby.

“ I saw from Mr. Carter’s countenance that he was thinking, and thinking very earnestly. He drank the soda-water and brandy ; but he said nothing to the waiter who brought him that popular beverage. When the man was gone, he came and planted himself opposite to me upon the hearth-rug.

“ ‘ I’m going to talk to you very seriously, sir,’ he said.

“ I assured him that I was quite ready to listen to any thing he might have to say.

“ ‘ When you employ a detective officer, sir,’ he began, ‘ don’t employ a man you can’t put entire confidence in. If you can’t trust him, don’t have any thing to do with him ; for if he isn’t to be trusted with the dearest family secrets that ever was kept sacred by an honest man, why he’s a scoundrel, and you’re much better off without his help. But when you’ve got a man that has been recommended to you by those who know him, trust him, and don’t be afraid to trust him, don’t confide in him by halves ; don’t tell him one part of your story, and keep the

other half hidden from him; because, you see, working in the twilight isn't much more profitable than working in the dark. Now, why do I say this to you, Mr. Austin? You know as well as I do. I say it because I know you haven't trusted me.'

"'I have told you all that it was absolutely necessary for you to know,' I said.

"'Not a bit of it, sir. It's absolutely necessary for me to know every thing: that is, if you want me to succeed in the business I'm engaged upon. You're afraid to give me your confidence out and out, without reserve. Lor' bless your innocence, sir; in my profession a man learns the use of his eyes; and when once he's learned how to use them, it ain't easy for him to keep them shut. I know as well as you do that you're hiding something from me: you're keeping something back, though you've half a mind to trust me. You took out a letter three times while we were sitting opposite to each other in the railway carriage; and you read the letter; and every now and then, while you were reading it,

you looked up at me with a hesitating you-would - and - you - wouldn't sort of look. You thought I was looking out of the window all the time ; and so I was, being uncommonly interested in the corn-fields we were passing just then, so flat and stumpy and picturesque they looked ; but, lor', Mr. Austin, if I couldn't look out of the window and watch you at the same time, I shouldn't be worth my salt to you or any one else. I saw plain enough that you had half a mind to show me that letter ; and it wasn't very difficult to guess that the letter had some bearing upon the business that has brought us to Winchester.'

"Mr. Carter paused, and settled himself comfortably against the corner of the chimney-piece. I was not surprised that he should have read my thoughts in the railway carriage. I pondered the matter seriously. He was right in the main, no doubt ; but how could I tell a detective officer my dearest secret—the sad story of my only love ?

"'Trust me, Mr. Austin,' my companion said ; 'if you want me to be of use to you, trust me

thoroughly. The very thing you are hiding from me may be the clue I most want to get hold of.'

" 'I don't think that,' I said. 'However, I have every reason to believe you to be an honest, conscientious fellow, and I will trust you. I dare say you wonder why I am so much interested in this business?'

" 'Well, to tell the honest truth, sir, it does seem rather out of the common to see an independent gentleman like you taking all this trouble to find out the rights and wrongs of a murder committed going on for a twelvemonth ago: unless you're any relation of the murdered man: and even if you're that, you're very unlike the common run of relations, for they generally take such things quieter than any body else,' answered Mr. Carter.

" 'I told the detective that I had never seen the murdered man in the course of my life, and had never heard his name until after the murder.

" 'Well, sir, then all I can say is, I don't understand your motive,' returned Mr. Carter.

" 'Well, Carter, I think you're a good fellow,



and I'll trust you,' I said; 'but, in order to do that, I must tell you a long story, and what's worse still, a love-story.'

"I felt that I blushed a little as I said this, and was ashamed of the false shame that brought that missish glow into my cheeks. Mr. Carter perceived my embarrassment, and was kind enough to encourage me.

"'Don't you be afraid of telling the story, because it's a sentimental one,' he said: 'Lor' bless you, I've heard plenty of love-stories. There aint many bits of business come our way, but what, if you sift 'em to the bottom, you find a petticoat. You remember the Oriental bloke that always asked, 'Who is she?' when he heard of a fight, or a fire, or a mad-bull broke loose, or any trifling calamity of that sort; because, according to his views, a female was at the bottom of every thing bad that ever happened upon this earth. Well, sir, if that Oriental potentate had lived in our times, and been brought up to the detective line, I'm blest if he need have changed his opinions. So don't you be ashamed of telling



a love-story, sir. I was in love myself once, though I do seem such a dry old chip; and I married the woman I loved, too; and she was a pretty little country girl, as fresh and innocent as the daisies in her father's paddocks; and to this day she don't know what my business really is. She thinks I'm *something* in the City, bless her dear little heart!

“This touch of sentiment in Mr. Carter's conversation was quite unaffected, and I felt all the more inclined to trust him after this little revelation of his domestic life. I told him the story of my acquaintance with Margaret very briefly, giving him only the necessary details. I told him of the girl's several efforts to see Henry Dunbar, and the banker's persistent avoidance of her. I told him then of our journey to Shorncliffe, and Margaret's strange conduct after her interview with the man she had been so eager to see.

“The telling of this, though I told it briefly, occupied nearly an hour. Mr. Carter sat opposite me all the time, listening intently; staring

at me with one fixed unvarying stare, and fingering musical passages upon his knees, with slow cautious motions of his big fingers and thumbs. But I could see that he was not listening only: he was pondering and reasoning upon what I told him. When I had finished my story, he remained silent for some minutes: but he still stared at me with the same relentless and stony gaze, and he still fingered his knees, following up his right hand with his left, as slowly and deliberately as if he had been composing a fugue after the manner of Mendelssohn.

“ ‘And up to the time of that interview at Maudesley Abbey, Miss Wilmot had stuck to the idea that Henry Dunbar was the murderer of her father?’ he said, at last.

“ ‘Most resolutely.’

“ ‘And after that interview the young lady changed her opinion all of a sudden, and would have it that the banker was innocent?’ asked Mr. Carter.

“ ‘Yes; when Margaret returned from Maudesley Abbey she declared her conviction of Henry Dunbar’s innocence.’

“ ‘And she refused to fulfil her engagement with you?’

“ ‘She did.’

“The detective left off fingering fugues upon his knees, and began to scratch his head, slowly pushing his hand up and down amongst his iron-gray hair, and staring at me. I saw now that this stony glare was only the fixed expression of Mr. Carter's face when he was thinking profoundly, and that the relentlessness of his gaze had very little relation to the object at which he gazed.

“I watched his face as he pondered, in the hope of seeing some sudden mental illumination light up his stolid countenance: but I watched in vain. I saw that he was at fault: I saw that Margaret Wilmot's conduct was quite as inexplicable to him as it had been to me.

“ ‘Mr. Dunbar's a very rich man,’ he said, at last; ‘and money generally goes a good way in these cases. There was a political party, Sir Robert somebody—but not Sir Robert Peel—who said, ‘Every man has his price.’ Now, do you

think it possible that Miss Wilmot would take a bribe, and hold her tongue?’

“ ‘Do I think that she would take money from the man she suspected as the murderer of her father—the man she knew to have been the enemy of her father? No,’ I answered, resolutely; ‘I am certain that she is incapable of any such baseness. The idea that she had been bribed flashed across me in the first bitterness of my anger: but even then I dismissed it as incredible. Now that I can think coolly of the business, I know that such an alternative is impossible. If Margaret Wilmot has been influenced by Henry Dunbar, it is upon her terror that he has acted. Heaven knows how he may have threatened her! The man who could lure his old servant into a lonely wood and there murder him—the man who, neither early nor late, had one touch of pity for the tool and accomplice of his youthful crime—not one lingering spark of compassion for the humble friend who sacrificed an honest name in order to serve his master—would have little compunction in torturing a friendless girl who dared

to come before him in the character of an accuser.'

" 'But you say that Miss Wilmot was resolute and high-spirited. Is she a likely person to be governed by her terror of Mr. Dunbar? What threat could he use to terrify her?'

" I shook my head hopelessly.

" 'I am as ignorant as you are,' I said; 'but I have strong reason to believe that Margaret Wilmot was under the influence of some great terror when she returned from Maudesley Abbey.'

" 'What reason?' asked Mr. Carter.

" 'Her manner was sufficient evidence that she had been frightened. Her face was as white as a sheet of paper when I met her, and she trembled and shrank away from me, as if even my presence was horrible to her.'

" 'Could you manage to repeat what she said that night and the next morning?'

" It was not very pleasant to me to re-open my wounds for the benefit of Mr. Carter the detective; but it would have been absurd to thwart the man when he was working in my interests. I

loved Margaret too well to forget any thing she ever said to me, even in our happiest and most careless hours : and I had special reason to remember that cruel farewell interview, and the strange scene in the corridor at the Reindeer, on the night of her return from Maudesley Abbey. I went over all this ground again, therefore, for Mr. Carter's edification, and told him, word for word, all that Margaret had said to me. When I had finished, he relapsed once more into a reverie, during which I sat listening to the ticking of an eight-day clock in the passage outside our sitting-room, and the occasional tramp of a passing foot-step on the pavement below our windows.

“ ‘ There's only one thing strikes me very particular in all you've told me,’ the detective said, by and by, when I had grown tired of watching him, and had suffered my thoughts to wander back to the happy time in which Margaret and I had loved and trusted each other ; ‘ there's only one thing strikes me in all the young lady said to you, and that is these words—‘ There is contamination in my touch,’ Miss Wilnot says to you. ‘ I am



unfit to be the associate of an honest man,' Miss Wilmot says to you. Now, that looks as if she had been bought over somehow or other by Mr. Dunbar. I've turned it over in my mind every way; and however I reckon it up, that's about what it comes to. The young woman was bought over, and she was ashamed of herself for being bought over.'

"I told Mr. Carter that I could never bring myself to believe this.

" 'Perhaps not, sir: but it may be gospel truth for all that. There's no other way I can account for the young woman's carryings on. If Mr. Dunbar was innocent, and had contrived, somehow or other, to convince the young woman of his innocence, why, she'd have come to you free and open, and would have said, 'My dear, I've made a mistake about Mr. Dunbar, and I'm very sorry for it; but we must look somewhere else for my poor pa's murderer.' But what does the young woman do? She goes and scrapes herself along the passage-wall, and shudders and shivers, and says, 'I'm a wretch; don't touch me



—don't come near me.' It's just like a woman to take the bribe, and then be sorry for having taken it.'

"I said nothing in answer to this. It was inexpressibly obnoxious to me to hear my poor Margaret spoken of as 'a young woman' by my business-like companion. But there was no possibility of keeping any veil over the sacred mysteries of my heart. I wanted Mr. Carter's help. For the present Margaret was lost to me; and my only hope of penetrating the hidden cause of her conduct lay in Mr. Carter's power to solve the dark enigma of Joseph Wilmot's death.

" 'Oh, by the by,' exclaimed the detective, 'there was a letter, wasn't there?'

"He held out his hand as I searched for the letter in my pocket-book. What a greedy, inquisitive-looking palm it seemed! and how I hated Mr. Henry Carter, detective officer, at that particular moment!

"I gave him the letter; and I did not groan aloud as I handed it to him. He read it slowly, once, twice, three times—half-a-dozen times, I

think, in all—pushing the fingers of his left hand through his hair as he read, and frowning at the paper before him. It was while he was reading the letter for the last time that I saw a sudden glimmer of light in his hard eyes, and a half-smile playing round his thin lips.

“ ‘Well?’ I said, interrogatively, as he gave me back the letter.

“ ‘Well, sir, the young lady,’—Mr. Carter called Margaret a young lady this time, and I could not help thinking that her letter had revealed her to him as something different from the ordinary class of female popularly described as a young woman,—‘the young lady was in earnest when she wrote that letter, sir,’ he said; ‘it wasn’t written under dictation, and she wasn’t bribed to write it. There’s heart in it, sir, if I may be allowed the expression: there’s a woman’s heart in that letter: and when a woman’s heart is once allowed scope, a woman’s brains shrivel up like so much tinder. I put this letter to that speech in the corridor at the Reindeer, Mr. Austin; and out of those two twos I verily believe

I can make the queerest four that was ever reckoned up by a first-class detective.'

"A faint flush, which looked like a glow of pleasure, kindled all over Mr. Carter's sallow face as he spoke, and he got up and walked about the room; not slowly or thoughtfully, but with a brisk eager tread that was new to me. I could see that his spirits had risen a great many degrees since the reading of the letter.

" 'You have got some clue,' I said; 'you see your way——'

"He turned round and checked my eager curiosity by a warning gesture of his uplifted hand.

" 'Don't be in a hurry, sir,' he said, gravely; 'when you lose your way of a dark night, in a swampy country, and see a light ahead, don't begin to clap your hands and cry hooray till you know what kind of light it is. It may be a Jack-o'-lantern; or it may be the identical lamp over the door of the house you're bound for. You leave this business to me, Mr. Austin, and don't you go jumping at conclusions. I'll work it out

quietly : and when I've worked it out, I'll tell you what I think of it. And now suppose we take a stroll through the cathedral-yard, and have a look at the place where the body was found.'

" 'How shall we find out the exact spot?' I asked, while I was putting on my hat and overcoat.

" 'Any passer-by will point it out,' Mr. Carter answered ; 'they don't have a popular murder in the neighbourhood of Winchester every day ; and when they do, I make not the least doubt they know how to appreciate the advantage. You may depend upon it, the place is pretty well known.'

"It was nearly five o'clock by this time. We went down the slippery oak-staircase, and out into the quiet street. A bleak wind was blowing down from the hills, and the rooks' nests high up in the branches of the old trees about the cathedral were rocking like that legendary cradle in the tree-top. I had never been in Winchester before, and I was pleased with the quaint old houses, the

towering cathedral, the flat meadows, and winding streams of water rippled by the wind. I was soothed, somehow or other, by the peculiar quiet of the scene: and I could not help thinking that, if a man's life was destined to be miserable, Winchester would be a nice place for him to be miserable in. A dreamy, drowsy, forgotten city, where the only changes of the slow day would be the varying chimes of the cathedral clock, the different tones of the cathedral bells.

“Mr. Carter had studied every scrap of evidence connected with the murder of Joseph Wilmot. He pointed out the door at which Henry Dunbar had gone into the cathedral, the pathway which the two men had taken as they went towards the grove. We followed this pathway, and walked to the very place in which the murdered man had been found.

“A lad who was fishing in one of the meadows near the grove went with us to show us the exact spot. It was between an elm and a beech.

“‘There's not many beeches in the grove,’

the lad said, 'and this is the biggest of them. So that it's easy enough for any one to pick out the spot. It was very dry weather last August at the time of the murder, and the water wasn't above half as deep as it is now.'

" 'Is it the same depth every where?' Mr. Carter asked.

" 'Oh, dear no,' the boy said; 'that's what makes these streams so dangerous for bathing: they're shallow enough in some places; but there's all manner of holes about; and unless you're a good swimmer, you'd better not try it on.'

" Mr. Carter gave the boy sixpence and dismissed him. We strolled a little farther on, and then turned and went back towards the cathedral. My companion was very silent, and I could see that he was still thinking. The change that had taken place in his manner after he read Margaret's letter had inspired me with new confidence in him, and I was better able to await the working out of events. Little by little the solemn nature of the business in which I was



engaged grew and gathered force in my mind, and I felt that I had something more to do than to solve the mystery of Margaret's conduct to myself: I had to perform a duty to society, by giving my uttermost help towards the discovery of Joseph Wilmot's murderer.

“ If the heartless assassin of this wretched man was suffered to live and prosper, to hold up his head as the master of Maudesley Abbey, the chief partner in a great City firm that had borne an honourable name for a century and a half, a kind of premium was offered to crime in high places. If Henry Dunbar had been some miserable starving creature, who, in a fit of mad fury against the inequalities of life, had lifted his gaunt arm to slay his prosperous brother for the sake of bread—detectives would have dogged his sneaking steps, and watched his guilty face, and hovered round and about him till they tracked him to his doom. But because in this case the man to whom suspicion pointed had the supreme virtues comprised in a million of money, Justice wore her thickest bandage, and the officials, who are so clever in



tracking a low-born wretch to the gallows, held aloof, and said respectfully, 'Henry Dunbar is too great a man to be guilty of a diabolical crime.'

"These thoughts filled my mind as I walked back to the George Hotel with Mr. Carter.

"It was half-past six when we entered the house, and we had kept dinner waiting half-an-hour, much to the regret of the most courteous of waiters, who expressed intense anxiety about the condition of the fish.

"As the man hovered about us at dinner, I expected every moment that Mr. Carter would lead up to the only topic which had any interest either for himself or me. But he was slow to do this; he talked of the town, the last assizes, the state of the country, the weather, the prosperity of the trout-fishing season—every thing except the murder of Joseph Wilmot. It was only after dinner, when some petrified specimens of dessert, in the shape of almonds and raisins, figs and biscuits, had been arranged on the table, that any serious business began. The preliminary skirmishing had not

been without its purpose, however ; for the waiter had been warmed into a communicative and confidential mood, and was now ready to tell us any thing he knew.

“ I delegated all our arrangements to my companion ; and it was something wonderful to see Mr. Carter lolling in his arm-chair with what he called the ‘ wine-cart ’ in his hand, deliberating between a forty-two port, ‘ light and elegant,’ and a forty-five port, ‘ tawny and richer bouquet.’

“ ‘ I think we may as well try number fifteen,’ he said, handing the list of wines to the waiter after due consideration ; ‘ and decant it carefully, whatever you do. I hope your cellar isn’t cold.’

“ ‘ Oh, no, sir ; master’s very careful of his cellar, sir.’

“ The waiter went away impressed with the idea that he had to deal with a couple of connoisseurs.

“ ‘ You’ve got those letters to write before ten o’clock, eh, Mr. Austin ? ’ said the detective, as the

waiter reëntered the room with a decanter on a silver salver.

“I understood the hint, and accordingly took my travelling-desk to a side-table near the fireplace. Mr. Carter handed me one of the wax-candles, and I sat down before the little table, unlocked my desk, and began to write a few lines to my mother; while the detective smacked his lips and knowingly deliberated over his first glass of port.

“‘Very decent quality of wine,’ he said, ‘very decent. Do you know where your master got it, eh? No, you don’t. Ah! bottled it himself, I suppose. I thought he might have got it at the Warren-Court sale the other day, at the other end of the county. Fill a glass for yourself, waiter, and put the decanter down by the fender; the wine’s rather cold. By the by, I heard your wines very well spoken of the other day, by a person of some importance too,—of considerable importance, I may say.’

“‘Indeed, sir,’ murmured the waiter, who was standing at a respectful distance from the

table, and was sipping his wine with deferential slowness.

“‘Yes; I heard your house spoken of by no less a person than Mr. Dunbar the great banker.’

“‘The waiter pricked up his ears. I pushed aside the letter to my mother, and waited with a blank sheet of paper before me.

“‘That was a very strange affair, by the by,’ said Mr. Carter. ‘Fill yourself another glass of wine, waiter; my friend here doesn’t drink port; and if you don’t help me to put away that bottle, I shall take too much. Were you examined at the inquest on Joseph Wilmot?’

“‘No, sir,’ answered the waiter, eagerly. ‘I were not, sir; and they do say as we ought every one of us to have been examined; for you see there’s little facts as one person will notice and as another won’t notice, and it isn’t a man’s place to come forward with every little trivial thing, you see, sir; but if little trivial things was drawn out of one and another, they might help, you see, sir.’

“There could be no end gained by taking notes of this reply, so I amused myself by making a good nib to my pen while I waited for something better worth jotting down.

“‘Some of your people were examined, I suppose?’ said Mr. Carter.

“‘Oh, yes, sir,’ answered the waiter; ‘master, he were examined to begin with; and then Brigmawl the head-waiter, he give his evidence; but, lor’, sir, without unfriendliness to William Brigmawl, which me and Brigmawl have been fellow-servants these eleven year, our head-waiter is that wrapped up in hisself, and his own cravats, and shirt-fronts, and gold studs, and Albert chain, that he’d scarcely take notice of an earthquake swallowing up half the world before his eyes, unless the muck and dirt of that earthquake was to spoil his clothes. William Brigmawl has been head-waiter in this house nigh upon thirty year; and beyond a stately way of banging-to a carriage-door, or showing visitors to their rooms, or poking a fire, and a kind of knack of leading on timid people to order expensive wines, I really don’t see Brig-

mawl's great merit. But as to Brigmawl at an inquest, he's about as much good as the Pope of Rome.'

" 'But why was Brigmawl examined in preference to any one else?'

" 'Because he was supposed to know more of the business than any of us, being as it was him that took the order for the dinner. But me and Eliza Jane the under-chambermaid was in the hall at the very moment when the two gentlemen came in.'

" 'You saw them both, then?'

" 'Yes, sir, as plain as I now see you. And you might have knocked me down with a feather when I was told afterwards that the one who was murdered was nothing more than a valet.'

" 'You're not getting on very fast with your letters,' said Mr. Carter, looking over his shoulder at me.

" 'I had written nothing yet, and I understood this as a hint to begin. I wrote down the waiter's last remark.



“ ‘Why were you so surprised to find he was a valet?’ Mr. Carter asked of the waiter.

“ ‘Because you see, sir, he had the look of a gentleman,’ the man answered; ‘an out-and-out gentleman. It wasn’t that he held his head higher than Mr. Dunbar, or that he was better dressed—for Mr. Dunbar’s clothes looked the newest and best; but he had a kind of languid don’t-careish way that seems to be peculiar to first-class gentlemen.’

“ ‘What sort of a looking man was he?’

“ ‘Paler than Mr. Dunbar, and thinner built, and fairer.’

“ ‘I jotted down the waiter’s remarks; but I could not help thinking that this talk about the murdered man’s manner and appearance was about as useless as any thing could be.

“ ‘Paler and thinner than Mr. Dunbar,’ repeated the detective; ‘paler and thinner, eh? This was one thing you noticed; but what was it, now, that you could have said at the inquest if you had been called as a witness?’

“ ‘Well, sir, I’ll tell you. It’s a small matter,



and I've mentioned it many a time, both to William Brigmaw and to others; but they talk me down, and say I was mistaken; and Eliza Jane, being a silly giggling hussy, can't bear me out in what I say. But I do most solemnly declare that I speak the truth, and am not deceived. When the two gentlemen—which gentlemen they both was to look at—came into our hall, the one that was murdered had his coat buttoned tight across his chest except one button; and through the space left by that one button I saw the glitter of a gold-chain?

“ ‘ Well, what then ?’

“ ‘ The other gentleman, Mr. Dunbar, had his coat open as he got out of the carriage, and I saw as plain as ever I saw any thing, that he had no gold-chain. But two minutes after he had come into the hall, and while he was ordering dinner, he took and buttoned his coat. Well, sir, when he came in, after visiting the cathedral, his coat was partly unbuttoned, and I saw that he wore a gold-chain, and, unless I'm very much mistaken, the same gold-chain that I'd seen peeping out of

the breast of the murdered man. I could almost have sworn to that chain because of the colour of the gold, which was a particular deep yaller. It was only afterwards that these things came back to my mind, and I certainly thought them very strange.'

“ ‘ Was there any thing else ? ’

“ ‘ Nothing ; except what Brigmawl dropped out one night at supper, some weeks after the inquest, about his having noticed Mr. Dunbar opening his desk while he was waiting for Joseph Wilmot to come home to dinner ; and Brigmawl do say, now that it ain't a bit of use, that Mr. Dunbar, do what he would, couldn't find the key of his own desk for ever so long. ’

“ ‘ He was confused, I suppose ; and his hands trembled, eh ? ’ asked the detective.

“ ‘ No, sir ; according to what Brigmawl said, Mr. Dunbar seemed as cool and collected as if he was made of iron. But he kept trying first one key and then another, for ever so long, before he could find the right one. ’

“ ‘ Did he, now ? that was queer.

“ ‘But I hope you won’t think any thing of what I’ve let drop, sir,’ said the waiter, hastily. ‘I’m sure I wouldn’t say any thing disrespectful against Mr. Dunbar; but you asked me what I saw, sir, and I have told you candid, and—’

“ ‘My good fellow, you’re perfectly safe in talking to me,’ the detective answered, heartily. ‘Suppose you bring us a little strong tea, and clear away this dessert; and if you’ve any thing more to tell us, you can say it while you’re pouring out the tea. There’s so much connected with these sort of things that never gets into the papers, that really it’s quite interesting to hear of ’em from an eye-witness.’

“ The waiter went away, pleased and re-assured, after clearing the table very slowly. I was impatient to hear what Mr. Carter had gathered from the man’s talk.

“ ‘Well,’ he said, ‘unless I’m very much mistaken, I think I’ve got my friend the master of Maudesley Abbey.’

“ ‘You do; but how so?’ I asked. ‘That

talk about the gold-chain having changed hands must be utterly absurd. What should Henry Dunbar want with Joseph Wilmot's watch and chain?

“ ‘ Ah, you're right there,’ answered Mr. Carter. ‘ What should Henry Dunbar want with Joseph Wilmot's gold-chain? That's one question. Why should Joseph Wilmot's daughter be so anxious to screen Henry Dunbar now that she has seen him for the first time since the murder? There's another question for you. Find the answer for it, if you can.’ ”

“ I told the detective that he seemed bent upon mystifying me, and that he certainly succeeded to his heart's content.

“ Mr. Carter laughed a triumphant little laugh.

“ ‘ Never you mind, sir,’ he said; ‘ you leave it to me, and you watch it well, sir. It'll work out very neatly, unless I'm altogether wrong. Wait for the end, Mr. Austin, and wait patiently. Do you know what I shall do to-morrow?’ ”

“ ‘ I haven't the faintest idea.’ ”

“ ‘ I shall waste no more time in asking questions. I shall have the water near the scene of the murder dragged. I shall try and find the clothes that were stripped off the man who was murdered last August ! ’ ”

## CHAPTER V.

### CLEMENT AUSTIN'S JOURNAL CONTINUED.

“THE rest of the evening passed quietly enough. Mr. Carter drank his strong tea, and then asked my permission to go out and smoke a couple of cigars in the High Street. He went, and I finished my letter to my mother. There was a full moon; but it was obscured every now and then by the black clouds that drifted across it. I went out myself to post the letter, and I was glad to feel the cool breeze blowing the hair away from my forehead, for the excitement of the day had given me a nervous headache.

“I posted my letter in a narrow street near the hotel. As I turned away from the post-office to go back to the High Street, I was startled by the apparition of a girlish figure upon the other side of the street—a figure so like Margaret's that

its presence in that street filled me with a vague sense of fear, as if the slender figure, with garments fluttering in the wind, had been a phantom.

“Of course I attributed this feeling to its right cause, which was doubtless neither more nor less than the over-excited state of my own brain. But I was determined to set the matter quite at rest, so I hurried across the way and went close up to the young lady, whose face was completely hidden by a thick veil.

“‘Miss Wilmot—Margaret,’ I said.

“I had thought it impossible that Margaret should be in Winchester, and I was only right, it seemed; for the young lady drew herself away from me abruptly and walked across the road, as if she mistook my error in addressing her for an intentional insult. I watched her as she walked rapidly along the narrow street, until she turned sharply away at a corner, and disappeared. When I first saw her, as I stood by the post-office, the moonlight had shone full upon her. As she went away, the moon was hidden by a fleecy gray cloud, and the street was wrapped in shadow. Thus it



was only for a few moments that I distinctly saw the outline of her figure. Her face I did not see at all.

"I went back to the hotel and sat by the fire, trying to read a newspaper, but unable to chain my thoughts to the page. Mr. Carter came in a little before eleven o'clock. He was in very high spirits, and drank a tumbler of steaming brandy-and-water with great gusto. But question him how I might, I could get nothing from him, except that he meant to have a search made for the dead man's clothes.

"I asked him why he wanted them, and what advantage would be gained by the finding of them; but he only nodded his head significantly, and told me to wait.

\* \* \* \* \*

"To-day has been most wretched—a day of miserable discoveries; and yet not altogether miserable, for the one grand discovery of the day has justified my faith in the woman I love.

"The morning was cold and wet. There was not a ray of sunshine in the dense gray sky, and

the flat landscape beyond the cathedral seemed almost blotted out by the drizzling rain ; only the hills, grand and changeless, towered above the mists, and made the landmarks of the soddened country.

“ We took an early and hasty breakfast. Quiet and business-like as the detective’s manner was even to-day, I could see that he was excited. He took nothing but a cup of strong tea and a few mouthfuls of dry toast, and then put on his coat and hat.

“ ‘ I’m going down to the chief quarters of the county constabulary,’ he said. ‘ I shall be obliged to tell the truth about my business down there, because I want every facility for what I am going to do. If you’d like to see the water dragged, you can meet me at twelve o’clock in the grove. You’ll find me superintending the work.’

“ It was about half-past eight when Mr. Carter left me. The time hung very heavily on my hands between that time and eleven o’clock. At eleven I put on my hat and overcoat, and went out into the rain.

“I found my friend the detective standing in one of the smaller entrances of the cathedral, in very earnest conversation with an old man. As Mr. Carter gave me no token of recognition, I understood that he did not want me to interrupt his companion's talk, so I walked slowly on by the same pathway along which we had gone on the previous afternoon; the same pathway by which the murdered man had gone to his death.

“I had not walked half a mile before I was joined by the detective.

“‘I gave you the office just now,’ he said, ‘because I thought if you spoke to me, that old chap would leave off talking, and I might miss something that was on the tip of his tongue.’

“‘Did he tell you much?’

“‘No; he's the man who gave his evidence at the inquest. He gave me a minute description of Henry Dunbar's watch and chain. The watch didn't open quite in the usual manner, and the gentleman was rather awkward in opening it, my friend the verger tells me. He was

awkward with the key of his desk. He seems to have had a fit of awkwardness that day.'

" 'You think that he was guilty, and that he was confused and agitated by the hideous business he had been concerned in?'

" Mr. Carter looked at me with a very queer smile on his face.

" 'You're improving, Mr. Austin,' he said; 'you'd make a first-class detective in next to no time.'

" I felt rather doubtful as to the meaning of this compliment, for there was something very like irony in Mr. Carter's tone.

" 'I'll tell you what I think,' he said, stopping presently, and taking me by the button-hole. 'I think that I know why the murdered man's coat, waistcoat, and shirt were stripped off him.'

" I begged the detective to tell me what he thought upon this subject; but he refused to do so.

" 'Wait and see,' he said; 'if I'm right, you'll soon find out what I mean; if I'm wrong, I'll

keep my thoughts to myself. I'm an old hand, and I don't want to be found out in a mistake.'

"I said no more after this. The disappearance of the murdered man's clothes had always appeared to me the only circumstance that was irreconcilable with the idea of Henry Dunbar's guilt. That some brutal wretch, who stained his soul with blood for the sake of his victim's poor possessions, should strip off the clothes of the dead, and make a market even out of them, was probable enough. But that Henry Dunbar, the wealthy, hyper-refined Anglo-Indian, should linger over the body of his valet, and offer needless profanation to the dead, was something incredible, and not to be accounted for by any theory whatever.

"This was the one point which, from first to last, had completely baffled me.

"We found the man with the drags waiting for us under the dripping trees. Mr. Carter had revealed himself to the constabulary as one of the chief luminaries of Scotland Yard; and if he had

wanted to dig up the foundations of the cathedral, they would scarcely have ventured to interfere with his design. One of the constables was lounging by the water's edge, watching the men as they prepared for business.

"I have no need to write a minute record of that miserable day. I know that I walked up and down, up and down, backwards and forwards, upon the soddened grass, from noon till sundown, always thinking that I would go away presently, always lingering a little longer; hindered by the fancy that Mr. Carter's search was on the point of being successful. I know that for hour after hour the grating sound of the iron drags grinding on the gravelly bed of the stream sounded in my tired ears, and yet there was no result. I know that rusty scraps of worn-out hardware, dead bodies of cats and dogs, old shoes laden with pebbles, rank entanglements of vegetable corruption, and all manner of likely and unlikely rubbish, were dragged out of the stream, and thrown aside upon the bank.

"The detective grew dirtier and slimier and

wetter as the day wore on; but still he did not lose heart.

“ ‘I’ll have every inch of the bed of the stream, and every hidden hole in the bottom, dragged ten times over, before I’ll give it up,’ he said to me, when he came to me at dusk with some brandy that had been brought by a boy who had been fetching beer, more or less, all the afternoon.

“ When it grew dark, the men lighted a couple of flaring, resinous torches, which Mr. Carter had sent for towards dusk, and worked by the patches of fitful light which these torches threw upon the water. I still walked up and down under the dripping trees, in the darkness, as I had walked in the light; and once when I was farthest from the red glare of the torches, a strange fancy took possession of me. In amongst the dim branches of the trees I thought I saw something moving, something that reminded me of the figure I had seen opposite the post-office on the previous night.

“ I ran in amongst the trees; and as I did so,



the figure seemed to me to recede, and disappear ; a faint rustling of a woman's dress sounded in my ears, or seemed so to sound, as the figure melted from my sight. But again I had good reason to attribute these fancies to the state of my own brain, after that long day of anxiety and suspense.

“ At last, when I was completely worn out by my weary day, Mr. Carter came to me.

“ ‘ They're found ! ’ he cried. ‘ We've found 'em ! We've found the murdered man's clothes ! They've been drifted away into one of the deepest holes there is, and the rats have been gnawing at 'em. But, please Providence, we shall find what we want. I'm not much of a church-goer, but I do believe there's a Providence that lies in wait for wicked men, and catches the very cleverest of them when they least expect it.’

“ I had never seen Mr. Carter so much excited as he seemed now. His face was flushed, and his nostrils quivered nervously.

“ I followed him to the spot where the constable and two men, who had been dragging the

stream, were gathered round a bundle of wet rubbish lying on the ground.

“ Mr. Carter knelt down before this bundle, which was covered with trailing weeds and moss and slime, and the constable stooped over him with a flaming torch in his hand.

“ ‘ These are somebody’s clothes, sure enough,’ the detective said ; ‘ and, unless I’m very much mistaken, they’re what I want. Has any body got a basket ?’

“ Yes. The boy who had fetched beer had a basket. Mr. Carter stuffed the slimy bundle into this basket, and put his arm through the handle.

“ ‘ You’re not going to look ’em over here, then ?’ said the local constable, with an air of disappointment.

“ ‘ No, I’ll take them straight to my hotel ; I shall have plenty of light there. You can come with me, if you like,’ Mr. Carter answered.

“ He paid the men, who had been at work all day, and paid them liberally, I suppose, for they seemed very well satisfied. I had given him money for any expenses such as these ; for I knew

that, in a case of this kind, every insignificant step entailed the expenditure of money.

“ We walked homewards as rapidly as the miserable state of the path, the increasing darkness, and the falling rain would allow us to walk. The constable walked with us. Mr. Carter whistled softly to himself as he went along, with the basket on his arm. The slimy green stuff and muddy water dripped from the bottom of the basket as he carried it.

“ I was still at a loss to understand the reason of his high spirits; I was still at a loss to comprehend why he attached so much importance to the finding of the dead man’s clothes.

“ It was past eight o’clock when we three men—the detective, the Winchester constable, and myself—entered our sitting-room at the George Hotel. The principal table was laid for dinner; and the waiter, our friend of the previous evening, was hovering about, eager to receive us. But Mr. Carter sent the waiter about his business.

“ ‘ I’ve got a little matter to settle with this gentleman,’ he said, indicating the Winchester

constable with a backward jerk of his thumb; 'I'll ring when I want dinner.'

"I saw the waiter's eyes open to an abnormal extent as he looked at the constable, and I saw a sudden blank apprehension creep over his face, as he retired very slowly from the room.

" 'Now,' said Mr. Carter, 'we'll examine the bundle.'

"He pushed away the dinner-table, and drew forward a smaller table. Then he ran out of the room, and returned in about two minutes carrying with him all the towels he had been able to find in my room and in his own, which were close at hand. He spread the towels on the table, and then took the slimy bundle from the basket.

" 'Bring me the candles—both the candles,' he said to the constable.

"The man held the two wax-candles on the right hand of the detective, as he sat before the table. I stood on his left hand, watching him intently.

"He touched the ragged and mud-stained bundle as carefully as if it had been some living

thing. Foul river-insects crept out of the weeds, which were so intermingled with the tattered fabrics that it was difficult to distinguish one substance from the other.

“ Mr. Carter was right: the rats had been at work. The outer part of the bundle was a coat—a cloth coat, gnawed into tatters by the sharp teeth of water-rats.

“ Inside the coat there was a waistcoat, a satin scarf that was little better than a pulp, and a shirt that had once been white. Inside the white shirt there was a flannel shirt, out of which there rolled half-a-dozen heavy stones. These had been used to sink the bundle, but were not so heavy as to prevent its drifting into the hole where it had been found.

“ The bundle had been rolled up very tightly, and the outer garment was the only one which had been destroyed by the rats. The inner garment—the flannel shirt—was in a very tolerable state of preservation.

“ The detective swept the coat and waistcoat and the pebbles back into the basket, and then

rolled both of the shirts in a towel, and did his best to dry them. The constable watched him with open eyes, but with no ray of intelligence in his stolid face.

“ ‘ Well,’ said Mr. Carter, ‘ there isn’t much here, is there? I don’t think I need detain you any longer. You’ll be wanting your tea, I dare say.’ ”

“ ‘ I didn’t think there would be much in them,’ the constable said, pointing contemptuously to the wet rags; his reverential awe of Scotland Yard had been considerably lessened during that long tiresome day. ‘ I didn’t see your game from the first, and I don’t see it now. But you wanted the things found, and you’ve had ’em found.’ ”

“ ‘ Yes; and I’ve paid for the work being done,’ Mr. Carter answered, briskly; ‘ not but what I’m thankful to you for giving me your help, and I shall esteem it a favour if you’ll accept a trifle, to make up for your lost day. I’ve made a mistake, that’s all; the wisest of us are liable to be mistaken once in a way.’ ”

“ The constable grinned as he took the sove-



reign which Mr. Carter offered him. There was something like triumph in the grin of that Winchester constable—the triumph of a country official who was pleased to see a Londoner at fault.

“ I confess that I groaned aloud when the door closed upon the man, and I found myself alone with the detective, who had seated himself at the little table, and was poring over one of the shirts outspread before him.

“ ‘ All this day’s labour and weariness has been so much wasted trouble,’ I said ; ‘ for it seems to have brought us no step nearer to the point we wanted to reach.’

“ ‘ Hasn’t it, Mr. Austin?’ cried the detective, eagerly. ‘ Do you think I am such a fool as to speak out before the man who has just left this room? Do you think I’m going to tell him my secret, or let him share my gains? The business of to-day has brought us to the very end we want to reach. It has brought about the discovery to which Margaret Wilmot’s letter was the first indication—the discovery pointed to by every word that man told us last night. Why did I



want to find the clothes worn by the murdered man? Because I knew that those garments must contain a secret, or they never would have been stripped from the corpse. It ain't often that a murderer cares to stop longer than he's obliged by the side of his victim; and I knew all along that whoever stripped off those clothes must have had a very strong reason for doing it. I have worked this business out by my own lights, and I've been right. Look there, Mr. Austin.'

"He handed me the wet discoloured shirt, and pointed with his finger to one particular spot.

"There, amidst the stains of mud and moss, I saw something which was distinct and different from them. A name, neatly worked in dark crimson thread—a Christian and surname in full.

"'How do you make that out?' Mr. Carter asked, looking me full in the face.

"Neither I nor any rational creature upon this earth able to read English characters could have well made out that name otherwise than I made it out.

"It was the name of Henry Dunbar.

“ ‘ You see it all now, don’t you?’ said Mr. Carter; ‘ that’s why the clothes were stripped off the body, and hidden at the bottom of the stream, where the water seemed deepest; that’s why the watch and chain changed hands; that’s why the man who came back to this house after the murder was slow to select the key of the desk. You understand now why it was so difficult for Margaret Wilmot to obtain access to the man at Maudesley Abbey; and why, when she had once seen that man, she tried to shield him from inquiry and pursuit. When she told you that Henry Dunbar was innocent of her father’s murder, she only told you the truth. The man who was murdered was Henry Dunbar; the man who murdered him was —’

“ I could hear no more. The blood surged up to my head, and I staggered back and dropped into a chair.

“ When I came to myself, I found the detective splashing cold water in my face. When I came to myself, and was able to think steadily of what had happened, I had but one feeling in

my mind; and that was pity, unutterable pity, for the woman I loved.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Mr. Carter carried the bundle of clothes to his own room, and returned by and by, bringing his portmanteau with him. He put the portmanteau in a corner near the fireplace.

“‘I’ve locked the clothes safely in that,’ he said, ‘and I don’t mean to let it out of my sight till it’s lodged in very safe hands. That mark upon Henry Dunbar’s shirt will hang his murderer.’

“‘There may have been some mistake,’ I said; ‘the clothes marked with the name of Henry Dunbar may not have really belonged to Henry Dunbar. He may have given those clothes to his old valet.’

“‘That’s not likely, sir; for the valet only met him at Southampton two or three hours before the murder was committed. No; I can see it all now. It’s the strangest case that ever came to my knowledge, but it’s simple enough when you’ve got the right clue to it. There was

no probable motive which could induce Henry Dunbar, the very pink of respectability, and sole owner of a million of money, to run the risk of the gallows; there were very strong reasons why Joseph Wilmot, a vagabond, and a returned criminal, should murder his late master, if by so doing he could take the dead man's place, and slip from the position of an outcast and a penniless reprobate into that of chief partner in the house of Dunbar and Company. It was a bold game to hazard, and it must have been a fearfully perilous and difficult game to play, and the man has played it well to have escaped suspicion so long. His daughter's conscientious scruples have betrayed him.'

"Yes, Mr. Carter spoke the truth. Margaret's refusal to fulfil her engagement had set in motion the machinery by means of which the secret of this most foul murder had been discovered.

"I thought of the strange revelation, still so new to me, until my brain grew dazed. How had it been done? How had it been managed? The man whom I had seen and spoken with was

not Henry Dunbar, then, but Joseph Wilmot, the murderer of his master—the treacherous and deliberate assassin of the man he had gone to meet and welcome after his five-and-thirty years' absence from England!

“‘But surely such a conspiracy must be impossible,’ I said, by and by; ‘I have seen letters in St. Gundolph Lane, letters in Henry Dunbar’s hand, since last August.’

“‘That’s very likely, sir,’ the detective answered, coolly. ‘I turned up Joseph Wilmot’s own history while I was making myself acquainted with the details of this murder. He was transported thirty years ago for forgery: he made a bold attempt at escape, but he was caught in the act, and removed to Norfolk Island. He was one of the cleverest chaps at counterfeiting any man’s handwriting that was ever tried at the Old Bailey. He was known as one of the most daring scoundrels that ever stepped on board a convict-ship—a clever villain, and a bold one—but not without some touches of good in him, I’m told. At Norfolk Island he worked so hard and behaved so well that

he got set free before he had served half his time. He came back to England, and was seen about London, and was suspected of being concerned in all manner of criminal offences, from card-sharping to coining, but nothing was ever brought home to him. I believe he tried to make an honest living, but couldn't: the brand of the gaol-bird was upon him; and if he ever did get a chance, it was taken away from him before the sincerity of any apparent reformation had been tested. This is his history, and the history of many other men like him.'

"And Margaret was the daughter of this man. An inexpressible feeling of melancholy took possession of me as I thought of this. I understood every thing now. This noble girl had heroically put away from her the one chance of a bright and happy life, rather than bring upon her husband the foul taint of her father's crime. I could understand all now. I looked back at the white face, rigid in its speechless agony; the fixed, dilated eyes; and I pictured to myself the horror of that scene at Maudesley Abbey, when the father and daughter stood opposite to each other, and



Margaret Wilmot discovered *why* the murderer had persistently hidden himself from her.

“The mystery of my betrothed wife’s renunciation of my love had been solved; but the discovery was so hideous that I looked back now and regretted the time of my ignorance and uncertainty. Would it not have been better for me if I had let Margaret Wilmot go her own way, and carry out her sublime scheme of self-sacrifice? Would it not have been better to leave the dark secret of the murder for ever hidden from all but that one dread Avenger whose judgments reach the sinner in his remotest hiding-place, and follow him to the grave? Would it not have been better to do this?

“No! my own heart told me the argument was false and cowardly. So long as man deals with his fellow-man, so long as laws endure for the protection of the helpless and the punishment of the wicked, the course of justice must know no hindrance from any personal consideration.

“If Margaret Wilmot’s father had done this hateful deed, he must pay the penalty of his crime,



though the broken heart of his innocent daughter was a sacrifice to his iniquity. If, by a strange fatality, I, who so dearly loved this girl, had urged onward the coming of this fatal day, I had only been a blind instrument in the mighty hand of Providence, and I had no cause to regret the revelation of the truth.

“There was only one thing left me. The world would shrink away, perhaps, from the murderer’s daughter; but I, who had seen her nature proved in the fiery furnace of affliction, knew what a priceless pearl Heaven had given me in this woman, whose name must henceforward sound vile in the ears of honest men, and I did not recoil from the horror of my poor girl’s history.

“‘If it has been my destiny to bring this great sorrow upon her,’ I thought, ‘it shall be my duty to make her future safe and happy.’

“But would Margaret ever consent to be my wife, if she discovered that I had been the means of bringing about the discovery of her father’s crime?

“This was not a pleasant thought, and it was

uppermost in my mind while I sat opposite to the detective, who ate a very hearty dinner, and whose air of suppressed high spirits was intolerable to me.

“Success is the very wine of life, and it was scarcely strange that Mr. Carter should feel pleased at having succeeded in finding a clue to the mystery that had so completely baffled his colleagues. So long as I had believed in Henry Dunbar's guilt, I had felt no compunction as to the task I was engaged in. I had even caught something of the detective's excitement in the chase. But now, now that I knew the shame and anguish which our discovery must inevitably entail upon the woman I loved, my heart sank within me, and I hated Mr. Carter for his ardent enjoyment of his triumph.

“‘You don't mind travelling by the mail-train, do you, Mr. Austin?’ the detective said, presently.

“‘Not particularly; but why do you ask me?’

“‘Because I shall leave Winchester by the mail to-night.’

“‘What for?’

“‘To get as fast as I can to Maudesley Abbey,

where I shall have the honour of arresting Mr. Joseph Wilmot.'

"So soon! I shuddered at the rapid course of justice when once a criminal mystery is revealed.

"But what if you should be mistaken? What if Joseph Wilmot was the victim and not the murderer?"

"In that case I shall soon discover my mistake. If the man at Maudesley Abbey is Henry Dunbar, there must be plenty of people able to identify him.'

"But Henry Dunbar has been away five-and-thirty years.'

"He has; but people don't think much of the distance between England and Calcutta nowadays. There must be people in England now who knew the banker in India. I'm going down to the resident magistrate, Mr. Austin; the man who had Henry Dunbar, or the supposed Henry Dunbar, arrested last August. I shall leave the clothes in his care, for Joseph Wilmot will be tried at the Winchester assizes. The mail leaves Win-

chester at a quarter before eleven,' added Mr. Carter, looking at his watch as he spoke; 'so I haven't much time to lose.'

"He took the bundle from the portmanteau, wrapped it in a sheet of brown paper which the waiter had brought him a few minutes before, and hurried away. I sat alone brooding over the fire, and trying to reason upon the events of the day.

"The waiter was moving softly about the room; but though I saw him look at me wistfully once or twice, he did not speak to me until he was about to leave the room, when he told me that there was a letter on the mantelpiece; a letter which had come by the evening post.

"The letter had been staring me in the face all the evening, but in my abstraction I had never noticed it.

"It was from my mother. I opened it when the waiter had left me, and read the following lines—

"*"MY DEAREST CLEM,—I was very glad to get your letter this morning, announcing your safe arrival at Winchester. I daresay I am a foolish old woman,*

*but I always begin to think of railway collisions, and all manner of possible and impossible calamities, directly you leave me on ever so short a journey.*

*“ I was very much surprised yesterday morning by a visit from Margaret Wilmot. I was very cool to her at first ; for though you never told me why your engagement to her was so abruptly broken off, I could not but think she was in some manner to blame, since I knew you too well, my darling boy, to believe you capable of inconstancy or unkindness. I thought, therefore, that her visit was very ill-timed, and I let her see that my feelings towards her were entirely changed.*

*“ But, oh, Clement, when I saw the alteration in that unhappy girl, my heart melted all at once, and I could not speak to her coldly or unkindly. I never saw such a change in any one before. She is altered from a pretty girl into a pale haggard woman. Her manners are as much changed as her personal appearance. She had a feverish restlessness that fidgeted me out of my life ; and her lips trembled every now and then while she was speaking, and her words seemed to die away as she tried to utter them. She*

*wanted to see you, she said; and when I told her that you were out of town, she seemed terribly distressed. But afterwards, when she had questioned me a good deal, and I told her that you had gone to Winchester, she started suddenly to her feet, and began to tremble from head to foot.*

“ ‘ I rang for wine, and made her take some. She did not refuse to take it; on the contrary, she drank the wine quite eagerly, and said, ‘ I hope it will give me strength. I am so feeble, so miserably weak and feeble, and I want to be strong.’ I persuaded her to stop and rest; but she wouldn’t listen to me. She wanted to go back to London, she said; she wanted to be in London by a particular time. Do what I would, I could not detain her. She took my hands and pressed them to her poor pale lips, and then hurried away, so changed from the bright Margaret of the past, that a dreadful thought took possession of my mind, and I began to fear that she was mad.’ ”

“ The letter went on to speak of other things; but I could not think of any thing but my mother’s description of Margaret’s visit. I understood her agitation at hearing of my journey to Winchester.



She knew that only one motive could lead me to that place. I knew now that the familiar figure I had seen in the moonlit street and in the dusky grove was no phantasm of my over-excited brain. I knew now that it was the figure of the noble-hearted woman I loved—the figure of the heroic daughter, who had followed me to Winchester, and dogged my footsteps, in the vain effort to stand between her father and the penalty of his crime.

“As I had been watched in the street on the previous night, I had been watched to-night in the grove. The rustling dress, the shadowy figure melting in the obscurity of the rain-blotted landscape had belonged to Margaret Wilmot!

“Mr. Carter came in while I was still pondering over my mother’s letter.

“‘I’m off,’ he said briskly. ‘Will you settle the bill, Mr. Austin? I suppose you’d like to be with me to the end of this business. You’ll go down to Maudesley Abbey with me, won’t you?’

“‘No,’ I said; ‘I will have no further hand in this matter. Do your duty, Mr. Carter; and the reward I promised shall be faithfully paid to



you. If Joseph Wilmot was the treacherous murderer of his old master, he must pay the penalty of his crime; I have neither the power nor the wish to shield him. But he is the father of the woman I love. It is not for me to help in hunting him to the gallows.'

"Mr. Carter looked very grave.

" 'To be sure, sir,' he said; 'I recollect now. I've been so wrapt up in this business that I forgot the difference it would make to you; but many a good girl has had a bad father, you know, sir, and—'

"I put up my hand to stop him.

" 'Nothing that can possibly happen will lessen my esteem for Miss Wilmot,' I said. 'That point admits of no discussion.'

"I took out my pocket-book, gave the detective money for his expenses, and wished him good night.

"When he had left me, I went out into the High Street. The rain was over, and the moon was shining in a cloudless sky. Heaven knows how I should have met Margaret Wilmot, had

chance thrown her in my way to-night. But my mind was filled with her image; and I walked about the quiet town, expecting at every turn in the street, at every approaching footstep sounding on the pavement, to see the figure I had seen last night. But go where I would, I saw no sign of her; so I came back to the hotel at last, to sit alone by the dull fire, and write this record of my day's work."

\* \* \* \* \*

While Clement Austin sat in the lonely sitting-room at the George Inn, with his rapid pen scratching along the paper before him, a woman walked up and down the lamp-lit platform at Rugby, waiting for the branch train which was to take her on to Shorncliffe.

This woman was Margaret Wilmot—the haggard, trembling girl whose altered manner had so terrified simple-hearted Mrs. Austin.

But she did not tremble now. She had pushed her thick black veil away from her face, and though no vestige of healthy colour had come back to her cheeks or lips, her features had a set look of stead-

fast resolution, and her eyes looked straight before her, like the eyes of a person who has one special purpose in view, and will not swerve or falter until that purpose has been carried out.

There was only one elderly gentleman in the first-class carriage in which Margaret Wilmot took her seat when the branch train for Shorncliffe was ready; and as this one fellow-passenger slept throughout the journey, with his face covered by an expansive silk handkerchief, Margaret was left free to think her own thoughts.

The girl was scarcely less quiet than her slumbering companion; she sat in one changeless attitude, with her hands clasped together in her lap, and her eyes always looking straight forward, as they had looked when she walked upon the platform. Once she put her hand mechanically to the belt of her dress, and then shook her head with a sigh as she drew it away.

“How long the time seems!” she said; “how long! and I have no watch now, and I can’t tell how late it is. If they should be there before me. If they should be travelling by this train.

No, that's impossible. I know that neither Clement, nor the man that was with him, left Winchester by the train that took me to London. But if they should telegraph to London or Shorncliffe?"

She began to tremble at the thought of this possibility. If that grand wonder of science, the electric telegraph, should be made use of by the men she dreaded, she would be too late upon the errand she was going on.

The mail-train stopped at Shorncliffe while she was thinking of this fatal possibility. She got out, and asked one of the porters to get her a fly; but the man shook his head.

"There's no flies to be had at this time of night, miss," he said, civilly enough. "Where do you want to go?"

She dared not tell him her destination; secrecy was essential to the fulfilment of her purpose.

"I can walk," she said; "I am not going very far." She left the station before the man could ask her any further question, and went out

into the moonlit country-road on which the station abutted. She went through the town of Shorncliffe, where the diamond casements were all darkened for the night, and under the gloomy archway, past the black shadows which the ponderous castle-towers flung across the rippling water. She left the town, and went out upon the lonely country-road, through patches of moonlight and shadow, fearless in her self-abnegation, with only one thought in her mind : " Would she be in time ? "

She was very tired when she came at last to the iron gates at the principal entrance of Maudesley Park. She had heard Clement Austin speak of a bridle-path through the park to Lisford, and he had told her that this bridle-path was approached by a gate in the park-fence upwards of a mile from the principal lodge.

She walked along by this fence, looking for the gate.

She found it at last; a little low wooden gate, painted white, and only fastened by a latch. Beyond the gate there was a pathway winding in

and out among the trunks of the great elms,  
across the dry grass.

Margaret Wilmot followed this winding path,  
slowly and doubtfully, till she came to the margin  
of a vast open lawn. Upon the other side of  
this lawn she saw the dark frontage of Maudesley  
Abbey, and three tall lighted windows gleaming  
through the night.

## CHAPTER VI.

### FLIGHT.

THE man who called himself Henry Dunbar was lying on the tapestried cushions of a carved oaken couch that stood before the fire in his spacious sitting-room. He lay there, listening to the March wind roaring in the broad chimney, and watching the blazing coals, the crackling logs of wood.

It was three o'clock in the morning now, and the servants had left the room at midnight; but the sick man had ordered a huge fire to be made up—a fire that promised to last for some hours.

The master of Maudesley Abbey was in no way improved by his long imprisonment. His complexion had faded to a dull leaden hue; his cheeks were sunken; his eyes looked unnaturally large and unnaturally bright. Long hours of



loneliness, long sleepless nights, and thoughts that from every diverging point for ever narrowed inwards to one hideous centre, had done their work of ruin. The man lying opposite the fire to-night looked ten years older than the man who gave his evidence so boldly and clearly before the coroner's jury at Winchester.

The crutches—they were made of some light, polished wood, and were triumphs of art in their way—leaned against a table close to the couch, and within reach of the man's hand. He had learned to walk about the rooms and on the gravel-drive before the Abbey with these crutches, and had even learned to do without them, for he was now able to set the lamed foot upon the ground, and to walk a few paces pretty steadily, with no better support than that of his cane; but as yet he walked slowly and doubtfully, in spite of his impatience to be about once more.

Heaven knows how many different thoughts were busy in his restless brain that night. Strange memories came back to him, as he lay staring at the red chasms and craggy steeps in the fire—

memories of a time so long gone by, that all the personages of that period seemed to him like the characters in a book, or the figures in a picture. He saw their faces, and he remembered how they had looked at him; and among these other faces he saw the many semblances which his own had worn.

O God, how that face had changed! The bright, frank, boyish countenance, looking eagerly out upon a world that seemed so pleasant; the young man's hopeful smile; and then—and then, the hard face that grew harder with the lapse of years; the smile that took no radiance from a light within; the frown that blackened as the soul grew darker. He saw all these, and still for ever, amid a thousand distracting ideas, his thoughts, which were beyond his own volition, concentrated in the one plague-spot of his life, and held him there, fixed as a wretch bound hand and foot upon the rack.

“If I could only get away from this place,” he said to himself; “if I could get away, it would all be different. Change of scene, activity,

hurrying from place to place in new countries and amongst strange people, would have the usual influence upon me. That memory would pass away then, as other memories have passed; only to be recalled, now and then, in a dream; or conjured up by some chance allusion dropped from the lips of strangers, some coincidence of resemblance in a scene, or face, or tone, or look. *That* memory cannot be so much worse than the rest that it should be ineffaceable, where they have been effaced. But while I stay here, here in this dismal room, where the dropping of the ashes on the hearth, the ticking of the clock upon the chimney-piece, are like that torture I have read of somewhere,—the drop of water falling at intervals upon the victim's forehead until the anguish of its monotony drives him raving mad,—while I stay here there is no hope of forgetfulness, no possibility of peace. I saw him last night, and the night before last, and the night before that. I see him always when I go to sleep, smiling at me, as he smiled when we went into the grove. I can hear his voice, and the

words he said, every syllable of those insignificant words, selfish murmurs about the probability of his being fatigued in that long walk, the possibility that it would have been better to hire a fly, and to have driven by the road—Bah! What was he that I should be sorry for him? Am I sorry for him? No! I am sorry for myself, and for the torture which I have created for myself. Oh, God! I can see him now as he looked up at me out of the water. The motion of the stream gave a look of life to his face, and I almost thought he was still alive, and I had never done that deed.”

These were the pleasant fireside thoughts with which the master of Maudesley Abbey beguiled the hours of his convalescence. Heaven keep our memories green! exclaims the poet-novelist; and Heaven preserve us from such deeds as make our memories hideous to us!

From such a reverie as this the master of Maudesley Abbey was suddenly aroused by the sound of a light knocking against one of the windows of his room,—the window nearest him as he lay on the couch.

He started, and lifted himself into a sitting posture.

“Who is there?” he cried, impatiently.

He was frightened, and clasped his two hands upon his forehead, trying to think who the late visitant could be. Why should any one come to him at such an hour, unless—unless *it* was discovered? There could be no other justification for such an intrusion.

His breath came short and thick as he thought of this. Had it come at last, then, that awful moment which he had dreamed of so many times—that hideous crisis which he had imagined under so many different aspects? Had it come at last, like this?—quietly, in the dead of the night, without one moment’s warning?—before he had prepared himself to escape it, or hardened himself to meet it? Had it come now? The man thought all this while he listened, with his chest heaving, his breath coming in hoarse gasps, waiting for the reply to his question.

There was no reply except the knocking, which grew louder and more hurried.

If there can be expression in the tapping of a hand against a pane of glass, there was expression in that hand; the expression of entreaty rather than of demand, as it seemed to that white and terror-stricken listener.

His heart gave a great throb, like a prisoner who leaps away from the fetters that have been newly loosened.

“What a fool I have been!” he thought. “If it was that, there would be knocking and ringing at the hall-door, instead of that cautious summons. I suppose that fellow Vallance has got into some kind of trouble, and has come in the dead of the night to hound me for money. It would be only like him to do it. He knows he must be admitted, let him come when he may.”

The invalid gave a groan as he thought this. He got up and walked to the window, leaning upon his cane as he went.

The knocking still sounded. He was close to the window, and he heard something besides the knocking—a woman’s voice, not loud, but peculiarly audible by reason of its earnestness.



“Let me in; for pity’s sake let me in!”

The man standing at the window knew that voice: only too well, only too well. It was the voice of the girl who had so persistently followed him, who had only lately succeeded in seeing him. He drew back the bolts that fastened the long French window, opened it, and admitted Margaret Wilmot.

“Margaret!” he cried; “what, in Heaven’s name, brings you here at such an hour as this?”

“Danger!” answered the girl, breathlessly. “Danger to you! I have been running, and the words seem to choke me as I speak. There’s not a moment to be lost, not one moment. They will be here directly; they cannot fail to be here directly. I felt as if they had been close behind me all the way—they may have been so. There is not a moment—not one moment!”

She stopped, with her hands clasped upon her breast. She was incoherent in her excitement, and knew that she was so, and struggled to express herself clearly.

“Oh, father!” she exclaimed, lifting her



hands to her head, and pushing the loose, tangled hair away from her face; "I have tried to save you—I have tried to save you! But sometimes I think that is not to be. It may be God's mercy that you should be taken, and your wretched daughter can die with you!"

She fell upon her knees, suddenly, in a kind of delirium, and lifted up her clasped hands.

"Oh, God, have mercy upon him!" she cried. "As I prayed in this room before—as I have prayed every hour since that dreadful time—I pray again to-night. Have mercy upon him, and give him a penitent heart, and wash away his sin. What is the penalty he may suffer here, compared to that Thou canst inflict hereafter? Let the chastisement of man fall upon him, so long as Thou wilt accept his repentance!"

"Margaret," said Joseph Wilmot, grasping the girl's arm, "are you praying that I may be hung? Have you come here to do that? Get up, and tell me what is the matter!"

Margaret Wilmot rose from her knees shud-

dering, and looking straight before her, trying to be calm—trying to collect her thoughts.

“Father,” she said, “I have never known one hour’s peaceful sleep since the night I left this room. For the last three nights I have not slept at all. I have been travelling, walking from place to place, until I could drop on the floor at your feet. I want to tell you—but the words—the words—won’t come—somehow——”

She pointed to her dry lips, which moved, but made no sound. There was a bottle of brandy and a glass on the table near the couch. Joseph Wilmot was seldom without that companion. He snatched up the bottle and glass, poured out some of the brandy, and placed it between his daughter’s lips. She drank the spirit eagerly. She would have drunk living fire, if, by so doing, she would have gained strength to complete her task.

“You must leave this house directly!” she gasped. “You must go abroad, any where, so long as you are safe out of the way. They will be here to look for you—heaven only knows how soon!”

“They! Who?”

“Clement Austin—and a man—a detective——”

“Clement Austin—your lover—your confederate? You have betrayed me, Margaret!”

“I!” cried the girl, looking at her father.

There was something sublime in the tone of that one word—something superb in the girl’s face, as her eyes met the haggard gaze of the murderer.

“Forgive me, my girl! No, no, you wouldn’t do that, even to a loathsome wretch like me!”

“But you will go away—you will escape from them?”

“Why should I be afraid of them? Let them come when they please, they have no proof against me.”

“No proof? Oh, father, you don’t know—you don’t know. They have been to Winchester. I heard from Clement’s mother that he had gone there; and I went after him, and found out where he was—at the inn where you stayed, where you refused to see me—and that there was a man with him. I waited about the streets; and at night

I saw them both, the man and Clement. Oh! father, I knew they could have only one purpose in coming to that place. I saw them at night; and the next day I watched again—waiting about the street, and hiding myself under porches or in shops, when there was any chance of my being seen. I saw Clement leave the George, and take the way towards the cathedral. I went to the cathedral-yard afterwards, and saw the strange man talking in a doorway with an old man. I loitered about the cathedral-yard, and saw the man that was with Clement go away, down by the meadows, towards the grove, to the place where——”

She stopped, and trembled so violently that she was unable to speak.

Joseph Wilmot filled the glass with brandy for the second time, and put it to his daughter's lips.

She drank about a teaspoonful, and then went on, speaking very rapidly, and in broken sentences—

“I followed the man, keeping a good way behind, so that he might not see that he was

followed. He went straight down to the very place where—the murder was done. Clement was there, and three men. They were there under the trees, and they were dragging the water.”

“Dragging the water! Oh, my God, why were they doing that?” cried the man, dropping suddenly upon the chair nearest to him, and with his face livid.

For the first time since Margaret had entered the room terror took possession of him. Until now he had listened attentively, anxiously; but the ghastly look of fear and horror was new upon his face. He had defied discovery. There was only one thing that could be used against him—the bundle of clothes, the marked garments of the murdered man—those fatal garments which he had been unable to destroy, which he had only been able to hide. These things alone could give evidence against him; but who should think of searching for these things? Again and again he had thought of the bundle at the bottom of the stream, only to laugh at the wondrous

science of discovery which had slunk back baffled by so slight a mystery, only to fancy the water-rats gnawing the dead man's garments, and all the ooze and slime creeping in and out amongst the folds until the rotting rags became a very part of the rank river-weeds that crawled and tangled round them.

He had thought this, and the knowledge that strangers had been busy on that spot, dragging the water—the dreadful water that had so often flowed through his dreams—with, not one, but a thousand dead faces looking up and grinning at him through the stream,—the tidings that a search had been made *there*, came upon him like a thunderbolt.

“Why did they drag the water?” he cried again.

His daughter was standing at a little distance from him. She had never gone close up to him, and she had receded a little—involuntarily, as a woman shrinks away from some animal she is frightened of—whenever he had approached her. He knew this—yes, amidst every other conflict-

ing thought, this man was conscious that his daughter avoided him.

“They dragged the water,” Margaret said; “I walked about—that place—under the elms—all the day—only one day—but it seemed to last for ever and ever. I was obliged to hide myself—and to keep at a distance, for Clement was there all day; but as it grew dusk I ventured nearer, and found out what they were doing, and that they had not found what they were searching for; but I did not know yet what it was they wanted to find.”

“But they found it!” gasped the girl’s father; “did they find it? Come to that.”

“Yes, they found it by and by. A bundle of rags, a boy told me—a boy who had been about with the men all day—‘a bundle of rags it looked like,’ he said; but he heard the constable say that those rags were the clothes that had belonged to the murdered man.”

“What then? what next?”

“I waited to hear no more, father; I ran all the way to Winchester to the station—I was



in time for a train, which brought me to London—I came on by the mail to Rugby—and——”

“Yes, yes ; I know—and you are a brave girl, a noble girl. Ah ! my poor Margaret, I don’t think I should have hated that man so much if it hadn’t been for the thought of you—your lonely girlhood—your hopeless, joyless existence—and all through him—all through the man who ruined me at the outset of my life. But I won’t talk—I daren’t talk : they have found the clothes ; they know that the man who was murdered was Henry Dunbar—they will be here—let me think—let me think how I can get away !”

He clasped both his hands upon his head, as if by force of their iron grip he could steady his mind, and clear away the confusion of his brain.

From the first day on which he had taken possession of the dead man’s property until this moment he had lived in perpetual terror of the crisis which had now arrived. There was no possible form or manner in which he had not imagined the situation. There was no preparation in his power to make that he had

left unmade. But he had hoped to anticipate the dreaded hour. He had planned his flight, and meant to have left Maudesley Abbey for ever, in the first hour that found him capable of travelling. He had planned his flight, and had started on that wintry afternoon, when the Sabbath bells had a muffled sound, as their solemn peals floated across the snow—he had started on his journey with the intention of never again returning to Maudesley Abbey. He had meant to leave England, and wander far away, through all manner of unfrequented districts, choosing places that were most difficult of approach, and least affected by English travellers.

He had meant to do this, and had calculated that his conduct would be, at the worst, considered eccentric; or, perhaps, it would be thought scarcely unnatural in a lonely man, whose only child had married into a higher sphere than his own. He had meant to do this, and by and by, when he had been lost sight of by the world, to hide himself under a new name and a new nationality, so that if

ever, by some strange fatality, by some awful interposition of Providence, the secret of Henry Dunbar's death should come to light, the murderer would be as entirely removed from human knowledge as if the grave had closed over him, and hidden him for ever.

This is the course that Joseph Wilmot had planned for himself. There had been plenty of time for him to think and plot in the long nights that he had spent in those splendid rooms—those noble chambers, whose grandeur had been more hideous to him than the blank walls of a condemned cell; whose atmosphere had seemed more suffocating than the foetid vapours of a fever-tainted den in St. Giles's. The passionate, revengeful yearning of a man who has been cruelly injured and betrayed, the common greed of wealth, engendered out of poverty's slow torture, had arisen rampant in this man's breast at the sight of Henry Dunbar. By one hideous deed both passions were gratified, and Joseph Wilmot, the bank messenger, the confidential valet, the forger, the convict, the ticket-

of-leave man, the penniless reprobate, became master of a million of money.

Yes, he had done this. He had entered Winchester upon that August afternoon, with a few sovereigns and a handful of silver in his pocket, and with a life of poverty and degradation before him. He had left the same town chief partner in the firm of Dunbar, Dunbar, and Balderby, and sole owner of Maudesley Abbey, the Yorkshire estates, and the house in Portland Place.

Surely this was the very triumph of crime, a masterstroke of villany. But had the villain ever known one moment's happiness since the commission of that deed—one moment's peace—one moment's freedom from a slow, torturing anguish that was like the gnawing of a ravenous beast for ever preying on his entrails? The author of the *Opium-Eater* suffered so cruelly from some internal agony that he grew at last to fancy there was indeed some living creature inside him, for ever torturing and tormenting him. This doubtless was only the fancy of an

invalid: but what of that undying serpent called Remorse, which coils itself about the heart of the murderer, and holds it for ever in a deadly grip—never to beat freely again, never to know a painless throb, or feel a sweet emotion?

In a few minutes—while the rooks were cawing in the elms, and the green leaves fluttering in the drowsy summer air, and the blue waters rippling in the sunshine and flecked by the shadows—Joseph Wilmot had done a deed which had given him the richest reward that a murderer ever hoped to win; and had so transformed his life, so changed the very current of his being, that he went away out of that wood, not alone, but dogged step by step by a gaunt, stalking creature, a hideous monster, that echoed his every breath, and followed at his shoulder, and clung about him, and grappled his throat, and weighed him down; a horrid thing, which had neither shape nor name, and yet wore every shape, and took every name, and was the ghost of the deed that he had done.

Joseph Wilmot stood for a few moments with

his hands clasped upon his head, and then the shadows faded from his face, which suddenly became fixed and resolute-looking. The first thrill of terror, the first shock of surprise, were over. This man never had been and never could be a coward. He was ready now for the worst. It may be that he was glad the worst had come. He had suffered such unutterable anguish, such indescribable tortures, during the time in which his guilt had been unsuspected, that it may have been a kind of relief to know that his secret was discovered, and that he was free to drop the mask.

While he paused, thinking what he was to do, some lucky thought came to him, for his face brightened suddenly with a triumphant smile.

"The horse!" he said. "I may ride, though I can't walk."

He took up his cane, and went to the next room, where there was a door that opened into the quadrangle, in which the master of the Abbey had caused a loose box to be built for his favourite horse. Margaret followed her father,

not closely, but at a little distance, watching him with anxious, wondering eyes.

He unfastened the half-glass door, opened it, and went out into the quadrangular garden, the quaint old-fashioned garden, where the flower-beds were primly dotted on the smooth grass-plot, in the centre of which there was a marble basin, and the machinery of a little fountain that had never played within the memory of living man.

“Go back for the lamp, Margaret,” Joseph Wilmot whispered. “I must have light.”

The girl obeyed. She had left off trembling now, and carried the shaded lamp as steadily as if she had been bent on some simple womanly errand. She followed her father into the garden, and went with him to the loose box where the horse was to be found.

The animal knew his master, even in that uncertain light. There was gas laid on in the millionaire’s stables, and a low jet had been left burning by the groom.

The horse plunged his head about his mas-



ter's shoulders, and shook his mane, and reared, and disported himself in his delight at seeing his old friend once more, and it was only Joseph Wilmot's soothing hand and voice that subdued the animal's exuberant spirits.

"Steady, boy, steady; quiet, old fellow," Joseph said, in a whisper.

Three or four saddles and bridles hung upon a rack in one corner of the small stable. Joseph Wilmot selected the things he wanted, and began to saddle the horse, supporting himself on his cane as he did so.

The groom slept in the house now, by his master's orders, and there was no one within hearing.

The horse was saddled and bridled in five minutes, and Joseph Wilmot led him out of the stable, followed by Margaret, who still carried the lamp. There was a low iron gate leading out of the quadrangle into the grounds. Joseph led the horse to this gate.

"Go back and get me my coat," he said to Margaret; "you'll go faster than I can. You'll

find a coat lined with fur on a chair in the bedroom."

His daughter obeyed, silently and quietly as she had done before. The rooms all opened one into the other. She saw the bed-room with the tall, gloomy bedstead, the light of the fire flickering here and there. She set the lamp down upon a table in this room, and found the fur-lined coat her father had sent her to fetch. There was a purse lying on a dressing-table, with sovereigns glittering through the silken network, and the girl snatched it up as she hurried away, thinking, in her innocent simplicity, that her father might have nothing but those few sovereigns to help him in his flight. She went back to him, carrying the bulky overcoat, and helped him to put it on in place of the dressing-gown he had been wearing. He had taken his hat before going to the stable.

"Here is your purse, father," she said, thrusting it into his hand; "there is something in it, but I'm afraid there's not very much. How will you manage for money where you are going?"

“Oh, I shall manage very well.”

He had got into the saddle by this time, not without considerable difficulty; but though the fresh air made him feel faint and dizzy, he felt himself a new man now that the horse was under him—the brave horse, the creature that loved him, whose powerful stride could carry him almost to the other end of the world; as it seemed to Joseph Wilnot in the first triumph of being astride the animal once more. He put his hand involuntarily to the belt that was strapped round him, as Margaret asked that question about the money.

“Oh, yes,” he said, “I’ve money enough—I am all right.”

“But where are you going?” she asked, eagerly.

The horse was tearing up the wet gravel, and making furious champing noises in his impatience of all this delay.

“I don’t know,” Joseph Wilnot answered; “that will depend upon—I don’t know. Good night, Margaret. God bless you! I don’t sup-

pose He listens to the prayers of such as me. If He did, it might have been all different long ago—when I tried to be honest!”

Yes, this was true; the murderer of Henry Dunbar had once tried to be honest, and had prayed God to prosper his honesty; but then he only tried to do right in a spasmodic, fitful kind of way, and expected his prayers to be granted as soon as they were asked, and was indignant with a Providence that seemed to be deaf to his entreaties. He had always lacked that sublime quality of patience, which endures the evil day, and calmly breasts the storm.

“Let me go with you, father,” Margaret said, in an entreating voice, “let me go with you. There is nothing in all the world for me, except the hope of God’s forgiveness for you. I want to be with you. I don’t want you to be amongst bad men, who will harden your heart. I want to be with you—far away—where—”

“*You* with me?” said Joseph Wilmot, slowly; “you wish it?”

“With all my heart!”

“And you’re true,” he cried, bending down to grasp his daughter’s shoulder and look into her face, “you’re true, Margaret, eh?—true as steel; ready for any thing, no flinching, no quailing or trembling when the danger comes. You’ve stood a great deal, and stood it nobly. Can you stand still more, eh?”

“For your sake, father, for your sake! yes, yes, I will brave any thing in the world, do any thing to save you from—”

She shuddered as she remembered what the danger was that assailed him, the horror from which flight alone could save him. No, no, no! *that* could never be endured at any cost; at any sacrifice he must be saved from *that*. No strength of womanly fortitude, no trust in the mercy of God, could ever make her resigned to *that*.

“I’ll trust you, Margaret,” said Joseph Wilmot, loosening his grasp upon the girl’s shoulder; “I’ll trust you. Haven’t I reason to trust you? Didn’t I see your mother, on the day when she found out what my history was; didn’t I see the colour fade out of her face till she was whiter than

the linen collar round her neck, and in the next moment her arms were about me, and her honest eyes looking up in my face, as she cried, ‘I shall never love you less, dear; there’s nothing in this world can make me love you less!’ ”

He paused for a moment. His voice had grown thick and husky; but he broke out violently in the next instant.

“Great Heaven! why do I stop talking like this? Listen to me, Margaret; if you want to see the last of me, you must find your way, somehow or other, to Woodbine Cottage, near Lisford,—on the Lisford Road, I think. Find your way there—I’m going there now, and shall be there long before you—you understand?”

“Yes; Woodbine Cottage, Lisford—I shan’t forget! God speed you, father!—God help you!”

“He is the God of sinners,” thought the wretched girl. “He gave Cain a long lifetime in which to repent of his sins.”

Margaret thought this as she stood at the gate, listening to the horse’s hoofs upon the

gravel road that wound through the grounds away into the park.

She was very, very tired, but had little sense of her fatigue, and her journey was by no means finished yet. She did not once look back at Maudesley Abbey—that stately and splendid mansion, in which a miserable wretch had acted his part, and endured the penalty of his guilt, for many wearisome months. She went away—hurrying along the lonely pathways, with the night breezes blowing her loose hair across her eyes, and half blinding her as she went—to find the gate by which she had entered the park.

She went out at this gateway because it was the only point of egress by which she could leave the park without being seen by the keeper of a lodge. The dim morning light was gray in the sky before she met any one whom she could ask to direct her to Woodbine Cottage; but at last a man came out of a farm-yard with a couple of milk-pails, and directed her to the Lisford Road.

It was broad daylight when she reached the



little garden-gate before Major Vernon's abode. It was broad daylight, and the door leading into the prim little hall was ajar. The girl pushed it open, and fell into the arms of a man, who caught her as she fainted.

"Poor girl, poor child!" said Joseph Wilmot; "to think what she has suffered. And I thought that she would profit by that crime; I thought that she would take the money, and be content to leave the mystery unravelled. My poor child! my poor, unhappy child!"

The man who had murdered Henry Dunbar wept aloud over the white face of his unconscious daughter.

"Don't let's have any of that fooling," cried a harsh voice from the little parlour; "we've no time to waste on snivelling."

## CHAPTER VII.

### AT MAUDESLEY ABBEY.

MR. CARTER the detective lost no time about his work; but he did not employ the telegraph, by which means he might perhaps have expedited the arrest of Henry Dunbar's murderer. He did not avail himself of the facilities offered by that wonderful electric telegraph, which was once facetiously called the rope that hung Tawell the Quaker, because in so doing he must have taken the local police into his confidence, and he wished to do his work quietly, only aided by a companion and humble follower, whom he was in the habit of employing.

He went up to London by the mail-train after parting with Clement Austin; took a cab at the Waterloo station, and drove straight off to the habitation of his humble assistant, whom he most

unceremoniously roused from his bed. But there was no train for Warwickshire before the six-o'clock parliamentary, and there was a seven-o'clock express, which would reach Rugby ten minutes after that miserably slow conveyance; so Mr. Carter naturally elected to sacrifice the ten minutes, and travel by the express. Meanwhile he took a hearty breakfast, which had been hastily prepared by the wife of his friend and follower, and explained the nature of the business before them.

It must be confessed that, in making these explanations to his humble friend, Mr. Carter employed a tone that implied no little superiority, and that the friendliness of his manner was tempered by condescension.

The friend was a middle-aged and most respectable-looking individual, with a turnip-hued skin, relieved by freckles, dark-red eyes, and pale-red hair. He was not a very prepossessing person, and had a habit of working about his lips and jaws when he was neither eating nor talking, which was far from pleasant to be-

hold. He was very much esteemed by Mr. Carter, nevertheless; not so much because he was clever, as because he looked so eminently stupid. This last characteristic had won for him the *sobriquet* of Sawney Tom, and he was considered worth his weight in sovereigns on certain occasions, when a simple country lad or a verdant-looking linendraper's apprentice was required to enact some little part in the detective drama.

"You'll bring some of your traps with you, Sawney," said Mr. Carter. "I'll take another, ma'am, if you please. Three minutes and a half this time, and let the white set tolerably firm." This last remark was addressed to Mrs. Sawney Tom, or rather Mrs. Thomas Tibbles—Sawney Tom's name was Tibbles—who was standing by the fire, boiling eggs and toasting bread for her husband's patron. "You'll bring your traps, Sawney," continued the detective, with his mouth full of buttered toast; "there's no knowing how much trouble this chap may give us; because you see a chap that can play the bold game he has

played, and keep it up for nigh upon a twelve-month, could play any game. There's nothing out that he need look upon as beyond him. So, though I've every reason to think we shall take my friend at Maudesley as quietly as ever a child in arms was took out of its cradle, still we may as well be prepared for the worst."

Mr. Tibbles, who was of a taciturn disposition, and who had been busily chewing nothing while listening to his superior, merely gave a jerk of acquiescence in answer to the detective's speech.

"We start as solicitor and clerk," said Mr. Carter. "You'll carry a blue bag. You'd better go and dress: the time's getting on. Respectable black and a clean shave, you know, Sawney. We're going to an old gentleman in the neighbourhood of Shorncliffe, that wants his will altered all of a hurry, having quarrelled with his three daughters; that's what *we're* goin' to do, if any body's curious about our business."

Mr. Tibbles nodded, and retired to an inner apartment, whence he emerged by and by dressed

in a shabby-genteel costume of somewhat funereal aspect, and with the lower part of his face rasped like a French roll, and somewhat resembling that edible in colour.

He brought a small portmanteau with him, and then departed to fetch a cab, in which vehicle the two gentlemen drove away to the Euston-Square station.

It was one o'clock in the day when they reached the great iron gates of Maudesley Abbey in a fly which they had chartered at Shorncliffe. It was one o'clock on a bright sunshiny day, and the heart of Mr. Carter the detective beat high with expectation of a great triumph.

He descended from the fly himself, in order to question the woman at the lodge.

"You'd better get out, Sawney," he said, putting his head in at the window, in order to speak to his companion; "I shan't take the vehicle into the park. I'll be quieter and safer for us to walk up to the house."

Mr. Tibbles, with his blue-bag on his arm, got out of the fly, prepared to attend his supe-

rior whithersoever that luminary chose to lead him.

The woman at the lodge was not alone; a little group of gossips were gathered in the primly-furnished parlour, and the talk was loud and animated.

“Which I was that took aback like, you might have knocked me down with a feather,” said the proprietress of the little parlour, as she went out of the rustic porch to open the gate for Mr. Carter and his companion.

“I want to see Mr. Dunbar,” he said, “on particular business. You can tell him I come from the banking-house in St. Gundolph Lane. I’ve got a letter from the junior partner there, and I’m to deliver it to Mr. Dunbar himself.”

The keeper of the lodge threw up her hands and eyes in token of utter bewilderment.

“Begging your pardon, sir,” she said, “but I have been that upset, I don’t know scarcely what I’m a-doing of. Mr. Dunbar have gone, sir, and nobody in that house don’t know why he went, or when he went, or where he’s gone. The man-



servant as waited on him found the rooms all empty the first thing this morning; and the groom as had charge of Mr. Dunbar's horse, and slep' at the back of the house, not far from the stables, fancied as how he heard a trampling last night where the horse was kep', but put it down to the animal bein' restless on account of the change in the weather; and this morning the horse was gone, and the gravel all trampled up, and Mr. Dunbar's gold-headed cane (which the poor gentleman was still so lame it was as much as he could do to walk from one room to another) was lying by the garden-gate; and how he ever managed to get out and about and saddle his horse and ride away like that *without* bein' ever heard by a creetur, nobody hasn't the slightest notion; and every body this morning was distracted like, searchin' 'igh and low; but not a sign of Mr. Dunbar were found nowhere."

Mr. Carter turned pale, and stamped his foot upon the gravel-drive. Two hundred pounds is a large stake to a poor man; and Mr. Carter's reputation was also trembling in the balance.

The very man he wanted gone—gone away in the dead of the night, while all the household was sleeping!

“But he was lame,” he cried. “How about that?—the railway accident—the broken leg—”

“Yes, sir,” the woman answered, eagerly, “that’s the very thing, sir; which they’re all talkin’ about it at the house, sir, and how a poor invalid gentleman, what could scarce stir hand or foot, should get up in the middle of the night and saddle his own horse, and ride away at a rampageous rate; which the groom says he *have* rode rampageous, or the gravel wouldn’t be tore up as it is. And they do say, sir, as Mr. Dunbar must have been took mad all of a sudden, and the doctor was in an awful way when he heard it; and there’s been people riding right and left lookin’ for him, sir. And Miss Dunbar—leastways Lady Jocelyn—was sent for early this morning, and she’s at the house now, sir, with her husband Sir Philip; and if your business is so very important, perhaps you’d like to see her—”

“I should,” answered the detective, briskly.

“ You stop here, Sawney,” he added, aside to his attendant ; “ you stop here, and pick up what you can. I’ll go up to the house and see the lady.”

Mr. Carter found the door open, and a group of servants clustered in the gothic porch. Lady Jocelyn was in Mr. Dunbar’s rooms, a footman told him. The detective sent this man to ask if Mr. Dunbar’s daughter would receive a stranger from London, on most important business.

The man came back in five minutes to say yes, Lady Jocelyn would see the strange gentleman.

The detective was ushered through the two outer rooms leading to that tapestried apartment in which the missing man had spent so many miserable days, so many dismal nights. He found Laura standing in one of the windows looking out across the smooth lawn, looking anxiously out towards the winding gravel-drive that led from the principal lodge to the house.

She turned away from the window as Mr. Carter approached her, and passed her hand across her forehead. Her eyelids trembled, and she had

the look of a person whose senses had been dazed by excitement and confusion.

“Have you come to bring me any news of my father?” she said. “I am distracted by this mysterious calamity.”

Laura looked imploringly at the detective. Something in his grave face frightened her.

“You have come to tell me of some new trouble,” she cried.

“No, Miss Dunbar—no, Lady Jocelyn, I have no new trouble to announce to you. I have come to this house in search of—of the gentleman who went away last night. I must find him at any cost. All I want is a little help from you. You may trust to me that he shall be found, and speedily, if he lives.”

“If he lives!” cried Laura, with a sudden terror in her face. “Surely you do not imagine—you do not fear that—”

“I imagine nothing, Lady Jocelyn. My duty is very simple, and lies straight before me. I must find the missing man.”

“You will find my father,” said Laura, with

a puzzled expression. “Yes, I am most anxious that he should be found; and if—if you will accept any reward for your efforts, I shall be only too glad to give all you can ask. But how is it that you happen to come here, and to take this interest in my father? You come from the banking-house, I suppose?”

“Yes,” the detective answered, after a pause, “yes, Lady Jocelyn, I come from the office in St. Gundolph Lane.”

Mr. Carter was silent for some few moments, during which his eyes wandered about the apartment in that professional survey which took in every detail, from the colour of the curtains and the pattern of the carpets, to the tiniest porcelain toy in an antique cabinet on one side of the fireplace. The only thing upon which the detective’s glance lingered was the lamp, which Margaret had extinguished.

“I’m going to ask your ladyship a question,” said Mr. Carter, presently, looking gravely, and almost compassionately, at the beautiful face before him; “you’ll think me impertinent, perhaps,

but I hope you'll believe that I'm only a straightforward business man, anxious to do my duty in my own line of life, and to do it with consideration for all parties. You seem very anxious about this missing gentleman; may I ask if you are very fond of him? It's a strange question, I know, my lady—or it seems a strange question—but there's more in the answer than you can guess, and I shall be very grateful to you if you'll answer it candidly."

A faint flush crept over Laura's face, and the tears started suddenly to her eyes. She turned away from the detective, and brushed her handkerchief hastily across those tearful eyes. She walked to the window, and stood there for a minute or so, looking out.

"Why do you ask me this question?" she asked, rather haughtily.

"I cannot tell you that, my lady, at present," the detective answered; "but I give you my word of honour that I have a very good reason for what I do."

"Very well, then, I will answer you frankly,"

said Laura, turning and looking Mr. Carter full in the face. "I will answer you, for I believe that you are an honest man. There is very little love between my father and me. It is our misfortune, perhaps; and it may be only natural that it should be so, for we were separated from each other for so many years, that, when at last the day of our meeting came, we met like strangers, and there was a barrier between us that could never be broken down. Heaven knows how anxiously I used to look forward to my father's return from India, or how bitterly I felt the disappointment when I discovered, little by little, that we should never be to one another what other fathers and daughters, who have never known the long bitterness of separation, are to each other. But pray remember that I do not complain; my father has been very good to me, very indulgent, very generous. His last act, before the accident which laid him up so long, was to take a journey to London on purpose to buy diamonds for a necklace, which was to be his wedding present to me. I do not speak of



this because I care for the jewels; but I am pleased to think that, in spite of the coldness of his manner, my father had some affection for his only child."

Mr. Carter was not looking at Laura, he was staring out of the window, and his eyes had that stolid glare with which they had gazed at Clement Austin while the cashier told his story.

"A diamond-necklace!" he said; "humph—ha, ha—yes!". All this was in an undertone, that hummed faintly through the detective's closed teeth. "A diamond-necklace! You've got the necklace, I suppose, eh, my lady?"

"No; the diamonds were bought, but they were never made up."

"The unset diamonds were bought by Mr. Dunbar?"

"Yes, to an enormous amount, I believe. While I was in Paris, my father wrote to tell me that he meant to delay the making of the necklace until he was well enough to go on the Continent. He could see no design in England that at all satisfied him."

“ No, I daresay not,” answered the detective ;  
“ I daresay he’d find it rather difficult to please himself in that matter.”

Laura looked inquiringly at Mr. Carter. There was something disrespectful, not to say ironical, in his tone.

“ I thank you heartily for having been so candid with me, Lady Jocelyn,” he said ; “ and believe me I shall have your interests at heart throughout this matter. I shall go to work immediately ; and you may rely upon it, I shall succeed in finding the missing man.”

“ You do not think that—that under some terrible hallucination, the result of his long illness—you don’t think that he has committed suicide ?”

“ No, Lady Jocelyn,” answered the detective, decisively, “ there is nothing further from my thoughts now.”

“ Thank Heaven for that !”

“ And now, my lady, may I ask if you’ll be kind enough to let me see Mr. Dunbar’s valet, and to leave me alone with him in these rooms ?

I may pick up something that will help me to find your father. By the by, you haven't a picture of him—a miniature, a photograph, or any thing of that sort, eh?"

"No, unhappily I have no portrait whatever of my father."

"Ah, that is unlucky; but never mind, we must contrive to get on without it."

Laura rang the bell. One of the superb footmen, the birds of paradise who consented to glorify the halls and passages of Maudesley Abbey, appeared in answer to the summons, and went in search of Mr. Dunbar's own man—the man who had waited on the invalid ever since the accident.

Having sent for this person, Laura bade the detective good morning, and went away through the vista of rooms to the other side of the hall, to that bright modernised wing of the house which Percival Dunbar had improved and beautified for the granddaughter he idolised.

Mr. Dunbar's own man was only too glad to be questioned, and to have a good opportunity of discoursing upon the event which had caused such

excitement and consternation. But the detective was not a pleasant person to talk to, as he had a knack of cutting people short with a fresh question at the first symptom of rambling; and, indeed, so closely did he keep his companion to the point, that a conversation with him was a kind of intellectual hornpipe between a set of fire-irons.

Under this pressure the valet told all he knew about his master's departure, with very little loss of time by reason of discursiveness.

“Humph!—ha!—ah, yes!” muttered the detective between his teeth; “only one friend that was at all intimate with your master, and that was a gentleman called Vernon, lately come to live at Woodbine Cottage, Lisford Road; used to come at all hours to see your master; was odd in his ways, and dressed queer; first came on Miss Laura's wedding-day; was awful shabby then; came out quite a swell afterwards, and was very free with his money in Lisford. Ah!—humph! You've heard your master and this gentleman at high words—at least you've fancied so; but, the doors being very thick, you ain't certain. It

might have been only telling anecdotes. Some gentlemen do swear and row like in telling anecdotes. Yes, to be sure! You've felt a belt round your master's waist when you've been lifting him in and out of bed. He wore it under his shirt, and was always fidgety in changing his shirt, and didn't seem to want you to see the belt. You thought it was a galvanic belt, or something of that sort. You felt it once, when you were changing your master's shirt, and it was all over little knobs as hard as iron, but very small. That's all you've got to say, except that you've always fancied your master wasn't quite easy in his mind, and you thought that was because of his having been suspected in the first place about the Winchester murder."

Mr. Carter jotted down some pencil-notes in his pocket-book while making this little summary of his conversation with the valet.

Having done this and shut his book, he prowled slowly through the sitting-room, bedroom, and dressing-room, looking about him, with the servant close at his heels.

“What clothes did Mr. Dunbar wear when he went away?”

“Gray trousers and waistcoat, small shepherd’s plaid, and he must have taken a greatcoat lined with Russian sable.”

“A black coat?”

“No; the coat was dark-blue cloth outside.”

Mr. Carter opened his pocket-book in order to add another memorandum—

“Trousers and waistcoat, shepherd’s plaid; coat, dark-blue cloth lined with sable. How about Mr. Dunbar’s personal appearance, eh?”

The valet gave an elaborate description of his master’s looks.

“Ha!—humph!” muttered Mr. Carter; “tall, broad-shouldered, hook-nose, brown eyes, brown hair mixed with gray.”

The detective put on his hat after making this last memorandum; but he paused before the table, on which the lamp was still standing.

“Was this lamp filled last night?” he asked.

“Yes, sir; it was always fresh filled every day.”

“How long does it burn?”

“Ten hours.”

“When was it lighted?”

“A little before seven o’clock.”

Mr. Carter removed the glass shade, and carried the lamp to the fireplace. He held it up over the grate, and drained the oil.

“It must have been burning till past four this morning,” he said.

The valet stared at Mr. Carter with something of that reverential horror with which he might have regarded a wizard of the middle ages. But Mr. Carter was in too much haste to be aware of the man’s admiration. He had found out all he wanted to know, and now there was no time to be lost.

He left the Abbey, ran back to the lodge, found his assistant Mr. Tibbles, and despatched that gentleman to the Shorncliffe railway station, where he was to keep a sharp look-out for a lame traveller in a blue-cloth coat lined with brown fur.



If such a traveller appeared, Sawney Tom was to stick to him wherever he went ; but was to leave a note with the station-master for his chief's guidance, containing information as to what he had done.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE HOUSEMAID AT WOODBINE COTTAGE.

IN less than a quarter of an hour after leaving the gate of Maudesley Park, the fly came to a standstill before Woodbine Cottage. Mr. Carter paid the man and dismissed the vehicle, and went alone into the little garden.

He rang a bell on one side of the half-glass door, and had ample leisure to contemplate the stuffed birds and marine curiosities that adorned the little hall of the cottage before any one came to answer his summons; he rang a second time before any one came, but after a delay of about five minutes a young woman appeared, with her face tied up in a coloured handkerchief. The detective asked to see Major Vernon, and the young woman ushered him into a little parlour at the back of the cottage, without either delay or hesitation.

The occupant of the cottage was sitting in an arm-chair by the fire. There was very little light in the room, for the only window looked into a miniature conservatory, where there were all manner of prickly and spiky plants of the cactus kind, which had been the delight of the late owner of Woodbine Cottage.

Mr. Carter looked very sharply at the gentleman sitting in the easy-chair; but the closest inspection showed him nothing but a good-looking man, between fifty and sixty years of age, with a determined-looking mouth, half shaded by a gray moustache.

"I've come to make a few inquiries about a friend of yours, Major Vernon," the detective said; "Mr. Dunbar, of Maudesley Abbey, who has been missing since four o'clock this morning."

The gentleman in the easy-chair was smoking a meerschaum. As Mr. Carter said those two words, "four o'clock," his teeth made a little clicking noise upon the amber mouthpiece of the pipe.

The detective heard the sound, slight as it was, and drew his inference from it. Major

Vernon had seen Joseph Wilmot, and knew that he had left the Abbey at four o'clock, and thus gave a little start of surprise when he found that the exact hour was known to others.

"You know where Mr. Dunbar has gone?" said Mr. Carter, looking still more sharply at the gentleman in the easy-chair.

"On the contrary, I was thinking of looking in upon him at the Abbey this evening."

"Humph!" muttered the detective; "then it's no use my asking you any questions on the subject."

"None whatever. Henry Dunbar is gone away from the Abbey, you say? Why, I thought he was still under medical supervision—couldn't move off his sofa, except to take a turn upon a pair of crutches."

"I believe it was so; but he has disappeared notwithstanding."

"What do you mean by disappeared? He has gone away, I suppose, and he was free to go away—wasn't he?"

"Oh! of course; perfectly free."

“Then I don’t so much wonder that he went,” exclaimed the occupant of the cottage, stooping over the fire, and knocking the ashes out of his meerschaum. “He’d been tied by the leg long enough, poor devil! But how is it you’re running about after him, as if he was a little boy that had bolted from his precious mother? You’re not the surgeon who was attending him?”

“No, I’m employed by Lady Jocelyn; in fact, to tell you the honest truth,” said the detective, with a simplicity of manner that was really charming; “to tell you the honest truth, I’m neither more nor less than a private detective, and I have come down from London direct to look after the missing gentleman. You see, Lady Jocelyn is afraid the long illness and fever, and all that sort of thing, may have had a very bad effect upon her poor father, and that he’s a little bit touched in the upper story, perhaps;—and, upon my word,” added the detective frankly, “I think this sudden bolt looks very like it. In which case I fancy we may

look for an attempt at suicide. What do you think now, Major Vernon, as a friend of the missing gentleman, eh?"

The Major smiled.

"Upon my word," he said, "I don't think you're so very far away from the mark. Henry Dunbar has been rather queer in his ways since that railway smash."

"Just so. I suppose you wouldn't have any objection to my looking about your house, and round the garden and out-buildings? Your friend *might* hide himself somewhere about your place. When once they take an eccentric turn, there's no knowing where to have 'em."

Major Vernon shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't think Dunbar's likely to have got into my house without my knowledge," he said; "but you're welcome to examine the place from garret to cellar, if that's any satisfaction to you."

He rang a bell as he spoke. It was answered by the girl whose face was tied up.

"Ah, Betty, you've got the toothache again, have you? A nice excuse for slinking your

work, eh, my girl? That's about the size of your toothache, I expect! Look here now, this gentleman wants to see the house, and you're to show him over it, and over the garden too, if he likes—and be quick about it, for I want my dinner."

The girl curtsied in an awkward country-fied manner, and ushered Mr. Carter into the hall.

"Betty!" roared the master of the house, as the girl reached the foot of the stairs with the detective; "Betty, come here!"

She went back to her master, and Mr. Carter heard a whispered conversation, very brief, of which the last sentence only was audible.

That last sentence ran thus:

"And if you don't hold your tongue, I'll make you pay for it."

"Ho, ho!" thought the detective; "Miss Betsy is to hold her tongue, is she? We'll see about that."

The girl came back to the hall, and led Mr. Carter into the two sitting-rooms in the front of the house. They were small rooms with



small furniture. They were old-fashioned rooms, with low ceilings, and queer cupboards nestling in out-of-the-way holes and corners ; and Mr. Carter had enough work to do in squeezing himself into the interior of these receptacles, which all smelt, more or less, of chandlery and rum,—that truly seaman-like spirit having been a favourite beverage with the late inhabitant of the cottage.

After examining half-a-dozen cupboards in the lower regions, Mr. Carter and his guide ascended to the upper story.

The girl called Betsy ushered the detective into a bedroom, which she said was her master's, and where the occupation of the Major was made manifest by divers articles of apparel lying on the chairs and hanging on the pegs, and, furthermore, by a powerful effluvium of stale tobacco, and a collection of pipes and cigar-boxes on the chimney-piece.

The girl opened the door of an impossible-looking little cupboard in a corner, behind a four-post bed ; but instead of inspecting the cup-

board, Mr. Carter made a sudden rush at the door, locked it, and then put the key in his pocket.

“No, thank you, Miss Innocence,” he said; “I don’t crick my neck, or break my back, by looking into any more of your cupboards. Just you come here.”

“Here” was the window, before which Mr. Carter planted himself.

The girl obeyed very quietly. She would have been a pretty-looking girl but for her toothache, or rather, but for the coloured handkerchief which muffled the lower part of her face, and was tied in a knot at the top of her head. As it was, Mr. Carter could only see that she had pretty brown eyes, which shifted left and right as he looked at her.

“Oh, yes, you’re an artful young hussy, and no mistake,” he said; “and that toothache’s only a judgment upon you. What was that your master said to you in the parlour just now, eh? What was that he told you to hold your tongue about, eh?”

Betty shook her head, and began to twist the corner of her apron in her hands.

“Master didn’t say nothing, sir,” she said.

“Master didn’t say nothing! Your morals and your grammar are about a match, Miss Betsy; but you’ll find yourself rather in the wrong box by and by, my young lady, when you find yourself committed to prison for perjury; which crime, in a young female, is transportation for life,” added Mr. Carter, in an awful tone.

“Oh, sir,” cried Betty, “it isn’t me; it’s master: and he do swear so when he’s in his tantrums. If the ’taters isn’t done to his likin’, sir, he’ll grumble about them quite civil at first, and then he’ll work hisself up like, and take and throw them at me one by one, and his language gets worse with every ’tater. Oh, what am I to do, sir! I daren’t go against him. I’d a’most sooner be transported, if it don’t hurt much.”

“Don’t hurt much!” exclaimed Mr. Carter; “why, there’s a ship-load of cat-o’-nine-tails goes out to Van Diemen’s Land every quarter, and reserved special for young females!”

“ Oh, I’ll tell you all about it, sir,” cried Mr. Vernon’s housemaid ; “ sooner than be took up for perjuring, I’ll tell you every thing.”

“ I thought so,” said Mr. Carter ; “ but it isn’t much you’ve got to tell me. Mr. Dunbar came here this morning on horseback, between five and six ?”

“ It was ten minutes past six, sir, and I was opening the shutters.”

“ Precisely.”

“ And the gentleman came on horseback, sir, and was nigh upon fainting with the pain of his leg ; and he sent me to call up master, and master helped him off the horse, and took the horse to the stable ; and then the gentleman sat and rested in master’s little parlour at the back of the house ; and then they sent me for a fly, and I went to the Rose and Crown at Lisford, and fetched a fly ; and before eight o’clock the gentleman went away.”

Before eight, and it was now past three. Mr. Carter looked at his watch while the girl made her confession.

“And, oh, please don’t tell master as I told you,” she said; “oh, please don’t, sir.”

There was no time to be lost, and yet the detective paused for a minute, thinking of what he had just heard.

Had the girl told him the truth; or was this a story got up to throw him off the scent? The girl’s terror of her master seemed genuine. She was crying now, real tears, that streamed down her pale cheeks and wetted the handkerchief that covered the lower part of her face.

“I can find out at the Rose and Crown whether any body did go away in a fly,” the detective thought.

“Tell your master I’ve searched the place, and haven’t found his friend,” he said to the girl; “and that I haven’t got time to wish him good morning.”

The detective said this as he went down stairs. The girl went into the little rustic porch with him, and directed him to the Rose and Crown at Lisford.

He ran almost all the way to the little inn;

for he was growing desperate now, with the idea that his man had escaped him.

“Why, he can do any thing with such a start,” he thought to himself. “And yet there’s his lameness—that’ll go against him.”

At the Rose and Crown Mr. Carter was informed that a fly had been ordered at seven o’clock that morning by a young person from Woodbine Cottage. The vehicle had not long come in, and the driver was somewhere about the stables.

The driver was summoned at Mr. Carter’s request, and from him the detective ascertained that a gentleman, wrapped up to the very nose, and wearing a coat lined with fur, and walking very lame, had been taken up by him at Woodbine Cottage. This gentleman had ordered the driver to go as fast as he could to Shorncliffe station; but on reaching the station, it appeared the gentleman was too late for the train he wanted to go by, for he came back to the fly, limping awful, and told the man to drive to Maningsly. The driver explained to Mr. Carter, that Man-

ingly was a little village three miles from Shorncliffe, on a by-road. Here the gentleman in the fur coat had alighted at an ale-house, where he dined, and stopped, reading the paper and drinking hot brandy-and-water, till after one o'clock. He acted altogether quite the gentleman, and paid for the driver's dinner and brandy-and-water, as well as his own. At half-after one he got into the fly, and ordered the man to go back to Shorncliffe station. At five minutes after two he alighted at the station, where he paid and dismissed the driver.

This was all Mr. Carter wanted to know.

"You get a fresh horse harnessed in double-quick time," he said, "and drive me to Shorncliffe station."

While the horse and fly were being got ready, the detective went into the bar, and ordered a glass of steaming brandy-and-water. He was accustomed to take liquids in a boiling state, as the greater part of his existence was spent in hurrying from place to place, as he was hurrying now.

"Sawney's got the chance this time," he



thought. "Suppose he was to sell me, and go in for the reward?"

The supposition was not a pleasant one, and Mr. Carter looked grave for a minute or so; but he quickly relapsed into a grim smile.

"I think Sawney knows me too well for that," he said; "I think Sawney is too well acquainted with me to try *that* on."

The fly came round to the inn-door while Mr. Carter reflected upon this. He sprang into the vehicle, and was driven off to the station.

At the Shorncliffe station he found every thing very quiet. There was no train due for some time yet; there was no sign of human life in the ticket-office or the waiting-rooms.

There was a porter asleep upon his truck on the platform, and there was one solitary young female sitting upon a bench against the wall, with her boxes and bundles gathered round her, and an umbrella and a pair of clogs on her lap.

Upon all the length of the platform there was no sign of Mr. Tibbles, otherwise Sawney Tom.

Mr. Carter awoke the porter, and sent him to

the station-master to ask if any letter addressed to Mr. Henry Carter had been left in that functionary's care. The porter went yawning to make this inquiry, and came back by and by, still yawning, to say that there was such a letter, and would the gentleman please step into the station-master's office to claim and receive it.

The note was not a long one, nor was it encumbered by any ceremonious phraseology.

*“Gent in furred coat turned up 2.10, took a ticket for Derby, 1 class, took ticket for same place self, 2 class.—Yrs to commd, T. T.”*

Mr. Carter crumpled up the note and dropped it into his pocket. The station-master gave him all the information about the trains. There was a train for Derby at seven o'clock that evening; and for the three and a half weary hours that must intervene Mr. Carter was left to amuse himself as best he might.

“Derby,” he muttered to himself, “Derby. Why, he must be going north; and what, in the name of all that's miraculous, takes him *that way*?”

## CHAPTER IX.

### ON THE TRACK.

THE railway journey between Shorncliffe and Derby was by no means the most pleasant expedition for a cold spring night, with the darkness lying like a black shroud on the flat fields, and a melancholy wind howling over those desolate regions, across which all night-trains seem to wend their way. I think that flat and darksome land which we look upon out of the window of a railway carriage in the dead of the night must be a weird district, conjured into existence by the potent magic of an enchanter's wand,—a dreary desert transported out of Central Africa, to make the night-season hideous, and to vanish at cock-crow.

Mr. Carter never travelled without a railway rug and a pocket brandy-flask; and sustained by these inward and outward fortifications against

the chilling airs of the long night, he established himself in a corner of the second-class carriage, and made the best of his situation.

Fortunately there was no position of hardship to which the detective was unaccustomed ; indeed, to be rolled up in a railway rug in the corner of a second-class carriage, was to be on a bed of down, as compared with some of his experiences. He was used to take his night's rest in brief instalments, and was snoring comfortably three minutes after the guard had banged to the door of his carriage.

But he was not permitted to enjoy any prolonged rest. The door was banged open, and a stentorian voice bawled into his ear that hideous announcement which is so fatal to the repose of travellers, "Change here !" &c. &c. The journey from Shorncliffe to Derby seemed almost entirely to consist of "changing here ;" and poor Mr. Carter felt as if he had passed a long night in being hustled out of one carriage into another, and off one line of railway on to another, with all those pauses on draughty platforms which are

so refreshing to the worn-out traveller who works his weary way across country in the dead of the night.

At last, however, after a journey that seemed interminable by reason of those short naps, which always confuse the sleeper's estimate of time, the detective found himself at Derby, still in the dead of the night; for to the railway traveller it is all dead of night after dark. Here he applied immediately to the station-master, from whom he got another little note directed to him by Mr. Tibbles, and very much resembling that which he had received at Shorncliffe.

*"All right up to Derby," wrote Sawney Tom.  
"Gent in furred coat took a ticket through to Hull.  
Have took the same, and go on with him direct.—  
Yours to command, T. T."*

Mr. Carter lost no time after perusing this communication. He set to work at once to find out all about the means of following his assistant and the lame traveller.

Here he was told that he had a couple of hours to wait for the train that was to take him

on to Normanton, and at Normanton he would have another hour to wait for the train that was to carry him to Hull.

“Ah, go it, do, while you’re about it!” he exclaimed bitterly, when the railway official had given him this pleasing intelligence. “Couldn’t you make it a little longer? When your end and aim lies in driving a man mad, the quicker you drive the better, *I* should think!”

All this was muttered in an undertone, not intended for the ear of the railway official. It was only a kind of safety-valve by which the detective let off his superfluous steam.

“Sawney’s got the chance,” he thought, as he paced up and down the platform; “Sawney’s got the trump cards this time; and if he’s knave enough to play them against me—— But I don’t think he’ll do that; our profession’s a conservative one, and a traitor would have an uncommon good chance of being kicked out of it. We should drop him a hint that, considering the state of his health, we should take it kindly of him if he would hook it; or send him some polite message

of that kind ; as the military swells do, when they want to get rid of a pal."

There were plenty of refreshments to be had at Derby, and Mr. Carter took a steaming cup of coffee and a formidable-looking pile of sandwiches before retiring to the waiting-room to take what he called "a stretch." He then engaged the services of a porter, who was to call him five minutes before the starting of the Normanton train, and was to receive an illegal *douceur* for that civility.

In the waiting-room there was a coke fire, very red and hollow, and a dim lamp. A lady, half buried in shawls, and surrounded by a little colony of small packages, was sitting close to the fire, and started out of her sleep to make nervous clutches at her parcels as the detective entered, being in that semi-conscious state in which the unprotected female is apt to mistake every traveller for a thief.

Mr. Carter made himself very comfortable on one of the sofas, and snored on peacefully until the porter came to rouse him, when he sprang up refreshed to continue his journey.



“Hull, Hull!” he muttered to himself. “His game will be to get off to Rotterdam, or Hamburg, or St. Petersburg, perhaps; any place that there’s a vessel ready to take him. He’ll get on board the first that sails. It’s a good dodge, a very neat dodge; and if Sawney hadn’t been at the station, Mr. Joseph Wilmot would have given us the slip as neatly as ever a man did yet. But if Mr. Thomas Tibbles is true, we shall nab him, and bring him home as quiet as ever any little boy was took to school by his mar and par. If Mr. Tibbles is true,—and as he don’t know too much about the business, and don’t know any thing about the extra reward, or the evidence that’s turned up at Winchester,—I daresay Thomas Tibbles will be true. Human nature is a very noble thing,” mused the detective; “but I’ve always remarked that the tighter you tie human nature down, the brighter it comes out.”

It was morning, and the sun was shining, when the train that carried Mr. Carter steamed slowly into the great station at Hull—it was morning, and the sun was shining, and the birds

singing, and in the fields about the smoky town there were herds of sweet-breathing cattle sniffing the fresh spring air, and labourers plodding to their work, and loaded wains of odorous hay and dewy garden-stuff were lumbering along the quiet country roads, and the new-born day had altogether the innocent look appropriate to its tender youth,—when the detective stepped out on the platform, calm, self-contained, and resolute, as brisk and business-like in his manner as any traveller in that train, and with no distinctive stamp upon him, however slight, that marked him as the hunter of a murderer.

He looked sharply up and down the platform. No, Mr. Tibbles had not betrayed him. That gentleman was standing on the platform, watching the passengers step out of the carriages, and looking more turnip-faced than usual in the early sunlight. He was chewing nothing with more than ordinary energy; and Mr. Carter, who was very familiar with the idiosyncrasies of his assistant, knew from that sign that things had gone amiss.

“ Well,” he said, tapping Sawney Tom on the shoulder, “ he’s given you the slip? Out with it; I can see by your face that he has.”

“ Well, he have then,” answered Mr. Tibbles, in an injured tone; “ but if he have, you needn’t glare at me like that, for it ain’t no fault of mine. If you ever follered a lame eel—and a lame eel as makes no more of it’s lameness than if lameness was a advantage—you’d know what it is to foller that chap in the furred coat.”

The detective hooked his arm through that of his assistant, and led Mr. Tibbles out of the station by a door which opened on a desolate region at the back of that building.

“ Now then,” said Mr. Carter, “ tell me all about it, and look sharp.”

“ Well, I was waitin’ in the Shorncliffe ticket-offis, and about five minutes after two in comes the gent as large as life, and I sees him take his ticket, and I hears him say Derby, on which I waits till he’s out of the offis, and I takes my own ticket, same place. Down we comes here with more changes and botheration than ever

was ; and every time we changes carriages, which we don't seem to do much else the whole time, I spots my gentleman, limpin' awful, and lookin' about him suspicious-like, to see if he was watched. And, of course, he weren't watched—oh, no ; nothin' like it. Of all the innercent young men as ever was exposed to the temptations of this wicked world, there never was sech a young innercent as that lawyer's clerk, a carryin' a blue bag, and a tellin' a promiskruous acquaintance, loud enough for the gent in the fur coat to hear, that he'd been telegraphed for by his master, which was down beyond Hull, on electioneerin' business ; and a cussin' of his master promiskruous to the same acquaintance for telegraphin' for him to go by sech a train. Well, we come to Derby, and the furry gent, he takes a ticket on to Hull ; and we come to Normanton, and the furry gent limps about Normanton station, and I sees him comfortable in his carriage ; and we comes to Hull, and I sees him get out on the platform, and I sees him into a fly, and I hears him give the order,

‘Victorier Hotel,’ which by this time it’s nigh upon ten o’clock, and dark and windy. Well, I gets up behind the fly, and rides a bit, and walks a bit, keepin’ the fly in sight until we comes to the Victorier; and there stoops down behind, and watches my gent hobble into the hotel, in awful pain with that lame leg of his, judgin’ the faces he makes; and he walks into the coffee-room, and I makes bold to foller him; but there never was sech a young innercent as me, and I sees my party sittin’ warmin’ his poor lame leg, and with a carpet-bag, and railway rug, and sechlike on the table beside him; and presently he gets up, hobblin’ worse than ever, and goes outside, and I hears him makin’ inquiries about the best way of gettin’ on to Edinborough by train; and I sat quiet, not more than three minutes at most, becos’, you see, I didn’t want to *look like* follerin’ him; and in three minutes’ time, out I goes, makin’ as sure to find him in the bar as I make sure of your bein’ close beside me at this moment; but when I went outside into the hall, and bar, and sech-

like, there wasn't a mortal vestige of that man to be seen; but the waiter, he tells me, as dignified and cool as yer please, that the lame gentleman has gone out by the door lookin' towards the water, and has only gone to have a look at the place and get a few cigars, and will be back in ten minutes to a chop which is bein' cooked for him. Well, I cuts out by the same door, thinkin' my lame friend can't be very far; but when I gets out on to the quay-side, there ain't a vestige of him; and though I cut about here, there, and every where, lookin' for him, until I'd nearly walked my legs off in less than half an hour's time, I didn't see a sign of him, and all I could do was to go back to the Victorier, and see if he'd gone back before me.

“Well, there was his carpet-bag and his railway rug just as he'd left 'em, and there was a little table near the fire all laid out snug and comfortable ready for him; but there was no more vestige of hisself than there was in the streets where I'd been lookin' for him; and so I went out again, with the perspiration streamin'



down my face, and I walked that blessed town till over one o'clock this mornin', lookin' right and left, and inquiren' at every place where such a gent was likely to try and hide hisself, and playin' up Mag's divarsions, which, if it was divarsions to Mag, was uncommon hard work to me; and then I went back to the Victorier, and got a night's lodgin'; and the first thing this mornin' I was on my blessed legs again, and down at the quay inquiren' about vessels, and there's nothin' likely to sail afore to-night, and the vessel as is expected to sail to-night is bound for Copenhagen, and don't carry passengers; but from the looks of her captain, I should say she'd carry any think, even to a churchyard full of corpuses, if she was paid to do it."

"Humph! a sailing vessel bound for Copenhagen; and the captain's a villanous-looking fellow, you say?" said the detective, in a thoughtful tone.

"He's about the villanousest I ever set eyes on," answered Mr. Tibbles.



“Well, Sawney, it’s a bad job, certainly; but I’ve no doubt you’ve done your best.”

“Yes, I have done my best,” the assistant answered, rather indignantly; “and considerin’ the deal of confidence you honoured me with about this here cove, I don’t see as I could have done hany think more.”

“Then the best thing you can do is to keep watch here for the starting of the up-trains, while I go and keep my eye upon the station at the other side of the water,” said Mr. Carter. “This journey to Hull may have been just a dodge to throw us off the scent, and our man may try and double upon us by going back to London. You’ll keep all safe here, Sawney, while I go to the other side of the compass.”

Mr. Carter engaged a fly, and made his way to a pier at the end of the town, whence a boat took him across the Humber to a station on the Lincolnshire side of the river.

Here he ascertained all particulars about the starting of the trains for London, and here he kept watch while two or three trains started.

Then, as there was an interval of some hours before the starting of another, he recrossed the water, and set to work to look for his man.

First he loitered about the quays a little, taking stock of the idle vessels, the big steamers that went to London, Antwerp, Rotterdam, and Hamburg—the little steamers that went short voyages up or down the river, and carried troops of Sunday idlers to breezy little villages beside the sea. He found out all about these boats, their destination, and the hours and days on which they were to start, and made himself more familiar with the water-traffic of the place in half an hour than another man could have done in a day. He also made acquaintance with the vessel that was to sail for Copenhagen—a black sulky-looking boat, christened very appropriately the *Crow*, with a black sulky-looking captain, who was lying on a heap of tarpauling on the deck, smoking a pipe in his sleep. Mr. Carter stood looking over the quay and contemplating this man for some moments with a thoughtful stare.

“He looks a bad ’un,” the detective muttered

as he walked away; "Sawney was right enough there."

He went into the town, and walked about, looking at the jewellers' shops with his accustomed rapid glance—a glance so furtive that it escaped observation—so full of sharp scrutiny that it took in every detail of the object looked at. Mr. Carter looked at the jewellers till he came to one whose proprietor blended the trade of money-lending with his more aristocratic commerce. Here Mr. Carter stopped, and entered by the little alley, within whose sombre shadows the citizens of Hull were wont to skulk, ashamed of the errand that betrayed their impecuniosity. Mr. Carter visited three pawnbrokers, and wasted a good deal of time before he made any discovery likely to be of use to him; but at the third pawnbroker's he found himself on the right track. His manner with these gentlemen was very simple.

"I'm a detective officer," he said, "from Scotland Yard, and I've a warrant for the apprehension of a man who's supposed to be hiding in Hull. He's known to have a quantity of unset

diamonds in his possession—they're not stolen, mind you, so you needn't be frightened on that score. I want to know if such a person has been to you to-day?"

"The diamonds are all right?" asked the pawnbroker, rather nervously.

"Quite right. I see the man has been here. I don't want to know any thing about the jewels: they're his own, and it's not them we're after. I want to know about *him*. He's been here, I see—the question is, what time?"

"Not above half an hour ago. A man in a dark-blue coat with a fur collar——"

"Yes; a man that walks lame."

The pawnbroker shook his head.

"I didn't see that he was lame," he said.

"Ah, you didn't notice; or he might hide it just while he was in here. He sat down, I suppose?"

"Yes; he was sitting all the time."

"Of course. Thank you; that'll do."

With this Mr. Carter departed, much to the relief of the money-lender.

The detective looked at his watch, and found that it was half-past one. At half-past three there was a London train to start from the station on the Lincolnshire side of the water. The other station was safe so long as Mr. Tibbles remained on the watch there; so for two hours Mr. Carter was free to look about him. He went down to the quay, and ascertained that no boat had crossed to the Lincolnshire side of the river within the last hour. Joseph Wilmot was therefore safe on the Yorkshire side; but if so, where was he? A man wearing a dark-blue coat lined with sable, and walking very lame, must be a conspicuous object wherever he went; and yet Mr. Carter, with all the aid of his experience in the detective line, could find no clue to the whereabouts of the man he wanted. He spent an hour and a half in walking about the streets, prying into all manner of dingy little bars and taprooms in narrow back streets and down by the water-side; and then was fain to go across to Lincolnshire once more, and watch the departure of the train.

Before crossing the river to do this, he had taken stock of the Crow and her master, and had seen the captain lying in exactly the same attitude as before, smoking a dirty black pipe in his sleep.

Mr. Carter made a furtive inspection of every creature who went by the up-train, and saw that conveyance safely off before he turned to leave the station. After doing this he lost no time in recrossing the water again, and landed on the Yorkshire side of the Humber as the clocks of Hull were striking four.

He was getting tired by this time, but he was not tired of his work. He was accustomed to spending his days very much in this manner; he was used to taking his sleep in railway carriages, and his meals at unusual hours, whenever and wherever he could get time to take his food. He was getting what he called "peckish" now, and was just going to the coffee-room of the Victoria Hotel with the intention of ordering a steak, and a glass of brandy-and-water—Mr. Carter never took beer, which is a sleepy beverage, inimical to that

perpetual clearness of intellect necessary to a detective—when he changed his mind, and walked back to the edge of the quay, to prow! along once more with his hands in his pockets, looking at the vessels, and to take another inspection of the deck and captain of the Crow.

“I shouldn’t wonder if my gentleman’s gone and hidden himself down below the hatchway of that boat,” he thought, as he walked slowly along the quay-side. “I’ve half a mind to go on board and overhaul her.”



## CHAPTER X.

### CHASING THE "CROW."

MR. CARTER was so familiar with the spot alongside which the Crow lay at anchor, that he made straight for that part of the quay and looked down over the side, fully expecting to see the dirty captain still lying on the tarpauling, smoking his dirty pipe.

But, to his amazement, he saw a strange vessel where he expected to see the Crow, and in answer to his eager inquiries amongst the idlers on the quay, and the other idlers on the boats, he was told that the Crow had weighed anchor half-an-hour ago, and was over yonder.

The men pointed to a dingy speck out seaward as they gave Mr. Carter this information—a speck which they assured him was neither more nor less than the Crow, bound for Copenhagen.

Mr. Carter asked whether she had been expected to sail so soon.

No, the men told him; she was not expected to have sailed till day-break next morning, and there wasn't above two-thirds of her cargo aboard her yet.

The detective asked if this wasn't rather a queer proceeding.

Yes, the men said, it was queer; but the master of the Crow was a queer chap altogether, and more than one absconding bankrupt had sailed for furren parts in the Crow. One of the men opined that the master had got a swell cove on board to-day, inasmuch as he had seen such a one hanging about the quay-side ten minutes or so before the Crow sailed.

"Who'll catch her?" cried Mr. Carter; "which of you will catch her for a couple of sovereigns?"

The men shook their heads. The Crow had got too much of a start, they said, considering that the wind was in her favour.

"But there's a chance that the wind may change after dark," returned the detective. "Come,

my men, don't hang back. Who'll catch the Crow yonder for a fiver, come? Who'll catch her for a fi'-pound note?"

"I will," cried a burly young fellow in a scarlet guernsey, and shiny boots that came nearly to his waist; "me and my mate will do it, won't us, Jim?"

Jim was another burly young fellow in a blue guernsey, a fisherman, part owner of a little bit of a smack with a brown mainsail. The two stalwart young fishermen ran along the quay, and one of them dropped down into a boat that was chained to an angle in the quay-side, where there was a flight of slimy stone steps leading down to the water. The other young man ran off to get some of the boat's tackle and a couple of shaggy overcoats.

"We'd best take something to eat and drink, sir," the young man said, as he came running back with these things; we may be out all night, if we try to catch yon vessel."

Mr. Carter gave the man a sovereign, and told him to get what he thought proper.

"You'd best have something to cover you besides what you've got on, sir," the fisherman said; "you'll find it rare and cold on t' water after dark."

Mr. Carter assented to this proposition, and hurried off to buy himself a railway rug; he had left his own at the railway station in Sawney Tom's custody. He bought one at a shop near the quay, and was back to the steps in ten minutes.

The fisherman in the blue guernsey was in the boat, which was a stout-built craft in her way. The fisherman in the scarlet guernsey made his appearance in less than five minutes, carrying a great stone-bottle, with a tin drinking-cup tied to the neck of it, and a rush-basket filled with some kind of provision. The stone-bottle and the basket were speedily stowed away in the bottom of the boat, and Mr. Carter was invited to descend and take the seat pointed out to him.

"Can you steer, sir?" one of the men asked.

Yes, Mr. Carter was able to steer. There was

very little that he had not learned more or less, in twenty years' knocking about the world.

He took the rudder when they had pushed out into the open water, the two young men dipped their oars, and away the boat shot out toward that seaward horizon on which only the keenest eyes could discover the black speck that represented the Crow.

“If it should be a sell after all,” thought Mr. Carter; “and yet that’s not likely. If he wanted to double on me and get back to London, he’d have gone by one of the trains we’ve watched; if he’d wanted to lie-by and hide himself in the town, he wouldn’t have disposed of any of his diamonds yet awhile; and then, on the other hand, why should the Crow have sailed before she’d got the whole of her cargo on board? Anyhow I think I have been wise to risk it, and follow the Crow. If this is a wild-goose chase, I’ve been in wilder than this before to-day, and have caught my man.”

The little fishing-smack behaved bravely when she got out to sea; but even with the help of the oars, stoutly plied by the two young men, they

gained no way upon the Crow, for the black speck grew fainter and fainter upon the horizon-line, and at last dropped down behind it altogether.

"We shall never catch her," one of the men said, helping himself to a cupful of spirit out of the stone-bottle, in a sudden access of despondency. "We shall no more catch t' Crow than we shall catch t' day before yesterday, unless t' wind changes."

"I doubt t' wind will change after dark," answered the other young man, who had applied himself oftener than his companion to the stone-bottle, and took a more hopeful view of things. "I doubt but we shall have a change come dark."

He was looking out to windward as he spoke. He took the rudder out of Mr. Carter's hand presently, and that gentleman rolled himself in his new railway rug, and lay down in the bottom of the boat, with one of the men's overcoats for a blanket and the other for a pillow, and lushed by the monotonous plashing of the water against the keel of the boat, fell into a pleasant slumber, whose blissfulness was only marred by the gridiron-like

sensation of the hard boards upon which he was lying.

He awoke from this slumber to hear that the wind had changed, and that the Pretty Polly—the boat belonging to the two fishermen was called the Pretty Polly—was gaining on the Crow.

“We shall be alongside of her in an hour,” one of the men said.

Mr. Carter shook off the drowsy influence of his long sleep, and scrambled to his feet. It was bright moonlight, and the little boat left a trail of tremulous silver in her wake as she cut through the water. Far away upon the horizon there was a faint speck of shimmering white, to which one of the young men pointed with his brawny finger. It was the dirty mainsail of the Crow bleached into silver whiteness under the light of the moon.

“There’s scarcely enough wind to puff out a farthin’ candle,” one of the young men said. “I think we’re safe to catch her.”

Mr. Carter took a cupful of rum at the in-



stigation of one of his companions, and prepared himself for the business that lay before him.

Of all the hazardous ventures in which the detective had been engaged, this was certainly not the least hazardous. He was about to venture on board a strange vessel, with a captain who bore no good name, and with men who most likely closely resembled their master; he was about to trust himself among such fellows as these, in the hope of capturing a criminal whose chances, if once caught, were so desperate that he would not be likely to hesitate at any measures by which he might avoid a capture. But the detective was not unused to encounters where the odds were against him, and he contemplated the chances of being hurled overboard in a hand-to-hand struggle with Joseph Wilmot as calmly as if death by drowning were the legitimate end of a man's existence.

Once, while standing in the prow of the boat, with his face turned steadily towards that speck in the horizon, Mr. Carter thrust his hand into the breast-pocket of his coat, where there lurked

the newest and neatest thing in revolvers; but beyond this action, which was almost involuntary, he made no sign that he was thinking of the danger before him.

The moon grew brighter and brighter in a cloudless sky, as the fishing-smack shot through the water, while the steady dip of the oars seemed to keep time to a wordless tune. In that bright moonlight the sails of the Crow grew whiter and larger with every dip of the oars that were carrying the Pretty Polly so lightly over the blue water.

As the boat gained upon the vessel she was following, Mr. Carter told the two young men his errand, and his authority to capture the runaway.

"I think I may count on your standing by me—eh, my lads?" he asked.

Yes, the young men answered; they would stand by him to the death. Their spirits seemed to rise with the thought of danger, especially as Mr. Carter hinted at a possible reward for each of them if they should assist in the capture of the runaway.

They rowed close under the side of the black and wicked-looking vessel, and then Mr. Carter, standing up in the boat, gave a "Yo-ho! aboard there!" that resounded over the great expanse of plashing water.

A man with a pipe in his mouth looked over the side.

"Hilloa! what's the row there?" he demanded, fiercely.

"I want to see the captain."

"What do you want with him?"

"That's my business."

Another man, with a dingy face, and another pipe in his mouth, looked over the side, and took his pipe from between his lips to address the detective.

"What the —— do you mean by coming alongside us?" he cried. "Get out of the way, or we shall run you down."

"Oh, no, you won't, Mr. Spelsand," answered one of the young men from the boat; "you'll think twice before you turn rusty with us. Don't you remember the time you tried to get off John

Bowman, the clerk that robbed the Yorkshire Union Assurance Office—don't you remember trying to get him off clear, and gettin' into trouble yourself about it?"

Mr. Spelsand bawled some order to the man at the helm, and the vessel veered round suddenly; so suddenly, that had the two young men in the boat been any thing but first-rate watermen, they and Mr. Carter would have become very intimately acquainted with the briny element around and about them. But the young men were very good watermen, and they were also familiar with the manners and customs of Captain Spelsand, of the Crow; so, as the black-looking schooner veered round, the little boat shot out into the open water, and the two young oarsmen greeted the captain's manœuvre with a ringing peal of laughter.

"I'll trouble you to lay-to while I come on board," said the detective, while the boat bobbed up and down on the water, close alongside of the schooner. "You've got a gentleman on board—a gentleman whom I've got a warrant against.

It can't much matter to him whether I take him now, or when he gets to Copenhagen; for take him I surely shall; but it'll matter a good deal to you, Captain Spelsand, if you resist my authority."

The captain hesitated for a little, while he gave a few fierce puffs at his dirty pipe.

"Show us your warrant," he said presently, in a sulky tone.

The detective had started from Scotland Yard in the first instance with an open warrant for the arrest of the supposed murderer. He handed this document up to the captain of the Crow, and that gentleman, who was by no means an adept in the unseamanlike accomplishments of reading and writing, turned it over, and examined it thoughtfully in the vivid moonlight.

He could see that there were a lot of formidable-looking words and flourishes in it, and he felt pretty well convinced that it was a genuine document, and meant mischief.

"You'd better come aboard," he said; "you don't want *me*, that's certain."

The captain of the Crow said this with an air of sublime resignation, and in the next minute the detective was scrambling up the side of the vessel, with the aid of a rope flung out by one of the sailors on board the Crow.

Mr. Carter was followed by one of the fishermen; and with that stalwart ally he felt himself equal to any emergency.

“I’ll just throw my eye over your place down below,” he said, “if you’ll hand me a lantern.”

This request was not complied with very willingly; and it was only on a second production of the warrant that Mr. Carter obtained the loan of a wretched sputtering wick, glimmering in a dirty little oil-lamp. With this feeble light he turned his back upon the lovely moonlight, and stumbled down into a low-ceilinged cabin, darksome and dirty, with berths which were as black and dingy and altogether as uninviting as the shelves made to hold coffins in a noisome underground vault.

There were three men asleep upon these shelves; and Mr. Carter examined these three sleepers as coolly as if they had indeed been the confined in-

mates of a vault. Amongst them he found a man whose face was turned towards the cabin-wall, but who wore a blue coat and a traveller's cap of fur, shaped like a Templar's helmet, and tied down over his ears.

The detective seized this gentleman by the fur collar of his coat and shook him roughly.

"Come, Mr. Joseph Wilmot," he said; "get up, my man. You've given me a fine chase for it; but you're nabbed at last."

The man scrambled up out of his berth, and stood in a stooping attitude, for the cabin was not high enough for him, staring at Mr. Carter.

"What are you talking of, you confounded fool!" he said. "What have I got to do with Joseph Wilmot?"

The detective had never loosened his hand from the fur collar of his prisoner's coat. The faces of the two men were opposite to each other, but only faintly visible in the dim light of the sputtering oil-lamp. The man in the fur-lined coat showed two rows of wolfish teeth, bared to the gums in a malicious grin.



“What do you mean by waking me out of sleep?” he asked. “What do you mean by assaulting and ballyragging me in this way? I’ll have it out of you for this, my fine gentleman. You’re a detective-officer, are you?—a knowing card, of course; and you’ve followed me all the way from Warwickshire, and traced me, step by step, I suppose, and taken no end of trouble, eh? Why didn’t you look after the gentleman *who stayed at home*? Why didn’t you look after the poor lame gentleman who stayed at Woodbine Cottage, Lisford, and dressed up his pretty daughter as a housemaid, and acted a little play to sell you, you precious clever police-officer in plain clothes? Take me with you, Mr. Detective; stop me in going abroad to improve my mind and manners by foreign travel, do, Mr. Detective; and won’t I have a fine action against you for false imprisonment,—that’s all?”

There was something in the man’s tone of bravado that stamped it genuine. Mr. Carter gnashed his teeth together in a silent fury.

Sold by that hazel-eyed housemaid with her

face tied up ! Sent away on a false trail, while the criminal got off at his leisure ! Fooled, duped, and laughed at after twenty years of hard service ! It was too bitter.

"Not Joseph Wilmot !" muttered Mr. Carter ;  
"not Joseph Wilmot !"

"No more than you are, my pippin," answered the traveller, insolently.

The two men were still standing face to face. Something in that insolent tone, something that brought back the memory of half-forgotten times, startled the detective. He lifted the lamp suddenly, still looking in the traveller's face, still muttering in the same half-absent tone, "Not Joseph Wilmot !" and brought the light on a level with the other man's eyes.

"No," he cried, with a sudden tone of triumph, "not Joseph Wilmot, but Stephen Vallance—Blackguard Steeve the forger—the man who escaped from Norfolk Island, after murdering one of the gaolers—beating his brains out with an iron, if I remember right. We've had our eye on you for a long time, Mr. Vallance ; but you've

contrived to give us the slip. Yours is an old case, yours is; but there's a reward to be got for the taking of you, for all that. So I haven't had my long journey for nothing."

The detective tried to fasten his other hand on Mr. Vallance's shoulder; but Stephen Vallance struck down that uplifted hand with a heavy blow of his fist, and, wresting himself from the detective's grasp, rushed up the cabin-stairs.

Mr. Carter followed close at his heels.

"Stop that man!" he roared to one of the fishermen; "stop him!"

I suppose the instinct of self-preservation inspired Stephen Vallance to make that frantic rush, though there was no possible means of escape out of the vessel, except into the open boat, or the still more open sea. As he receded from the advancing detective, one of the fishermen sprang towards him from another part of the deck. Thus hemmed in by the two, and dazzled, perhaps, by the sudden brilliancy of the moonlight after the darkness of the place below, he reeled back against an opening in the side of the vessel, lost his bal-

ance, and fell with a heavy plunge into the water.

There was a sudden commotion on the deck, a simultaneous shout as the men rushed to the side.

"Save him!" cried the detective. "He's got a belt stuffed with diamonds round his waist!"

Mr. Carter said this at a venture, for he did not know which of the men had the diamond belt.

One of the fishermen threw off his shoes, and took a header into the water. The rest of the men stood by breathless, eagerly watching two heads bobbing up and down amongst the moonlit waves, two pair of arms buffeting with the water. The force of the current drifted the two men far away from the schooner.

For an interval that seemed a long one, all was uncertainty. The schooner that had made so little way before seemed now to fly in the faint night wind. At last there was a shout, and a head appeared above the water advancing steadily towards the vessel.

"I've got him!" shouted the voice of the fisherman. "I've got him by the belt!"

He came nearer to the vessel, striking out vigorously with one arm, and holding some burden with the other.

When he was close under the side, the captain of the Crow flung out a rope ; but as the fisherman lifted his hand to grasp it, he uttered a sudden cry, and raised the other hand with a splash out of the water.

“ The belt’s broke, and he’s sunk ! ” he shouted.

The belt had broken. A little ripple of light flashed briefly in the moonlight, and fell like a shower of spray from a fountain. Those glittering drops, that looked like fountain spray, were some of the diamonds bought by Joseph Wilmot ; and Stephen Vallance, alias Blackguard Steeve, alias Herr Von Volterchoker, alias Mr. Vernon, had gone down to the bottom of the sea, never in this mortal life to rise again.

## CHAPTER XI.

### GIVING IT UP.

THE Pretty Polly went back to the port of Kingston-upon-Hull in the gray morning light, carrying Mr. Carter, very cold and very down-hearted—not to say humiliated—by his failure. To have been hoodwinked by a girl, whose devotion to the unhappy wretch she called her father had transformed her into a heroine—to have fallen so easily into the trap that had been set for him, being all the while profoundly impressed with the sense of his own cleverness—was, to say the least of it, depressing to the spirits of a first-class detective.

“And that fellow Vallance too,” mused Mr. Carter, “to think that he should go and chuck himself into the water just to spite me! There’d have been some credit in taking him back with me. I might have made a bit of character out of

that. But, no! he goes and tumbles back'ards into the water, rather than let me have any advantage out of him."

There was nothing for Mr. Carter to do but to go straight back to Lisford, and try his luck again, with every thing against him.

"Let me get back as fast as I may, Joseph Wilmot will have had eight-and-forty hours' start of me," he thought; "and what can't he do in that time, if he keeps his wits about him, and don't go wild and foolish like, as some of 'em do, when they've got such a chance as this. Anyhow, I'm after him, and it'll go hard with me if he gives me the slip after all, for my blood's up, and my character's at stake, and I'd think no more of crossing the Atlantic after him than I'd think of going over Waterloo Bridge!"

It was a very chill and miserable time of the morning when the Pretty Polly ground her nose against the granite steps of the quay. It was a chill and dismal hour of the morning, and Mr. Carter felt sloppy, and dirty, and unshaven, as he stepped out of the boat and staggered up the slimy



stairs. He gave the two young fishermen the promised five-pound note, and left them very well contented with their night's work, inglorious though it had been.

There were no vehicles to be had at that early hour of the morning, so Mr. Carter was fain to walk from the quay to the station, where he expected to find Mr. Tibbles, or to obtain tidings of that gentleman. He was not disappointed ; for, although the station wore its dreariest aspect, having only just begun to throb with a little spasmodic life, in the way of an early goods-train, Mr. Carter found his devoted follower prowling in melancholy loneliness amid a wilderness of empty carriages and smokeless engines, with the turnip whiteness of his complexion relieved by a red nose.

Mr. Thomas Tibbles was by no means in the best possible temper in this chill early morning. He was slapping his long thin arms across his narrow chest, and performing a kind of amateur double-shuffle with his long flat feet, when Mr. Carter approached him ; and he kept up the same

shuffling and the same slapping while engaged in conversation with his superior, in a disrespectful, if not defiant manner.

“ A pretty game you’ve played me,” he said, in an injured tone. “ You told me to hang about the station and watch the trains, and you’d come back in the course of the day—you would—and we’d dine together comfortable at the Station Hotel; and a deal you come back and dined together comfortable. Oh, yes! I don’t think so; very much indeed,” exclaimed Mr. Tibbles, vaguely, but with the bitterest derision in his voice and manner.

“ Come, Sawney, don’t you go to cut up rough about it,” said Mr. Carter, coaxingly.

“ I should like to know who’d go and cut up smooth about it?” answered the indignant Tibbles. “ Why, if you could have a hangel in the detective business—which luckily you can’t, for the wings would cut out any thing as mean as legs, and be the ruin of the purfession—the temper of that hangel would give way under what I’ve gone through. Hanging about this

windy station, which the number of criss-cross draughts cuttin' in from open doors and winders would lead a hignorant person to believe there was seventeen p'int of the compass at the very least—hangin' about to watch train after train, till there ain't any thing goin' in the way of sarce as you haven't got to stand from the porters; or sittin' in the coffee-room of the hotel yonder, watchin' and listenin' for the next train, till bein' there to keep an appointment with your master is the hollerest of mockeries."

Mr. Carter took his irate subordinate to the coffee-room of the Station Hotel, where Mr. Tibbles had engaged a bed and taken a few hours' sleep in the dead interval between the starting of the last train at night and the first in the morning. The detective ordered a substantial breakfast, with a couple of glasses of pale brandy, neat, to begin with; and Mr. Tibbles' equanimity was restored, under the influence of ham, eggs, mutton cutlet, a broiled sole, and a quart or so of boiling coffee.

Mr. Carter told his assistant very briefly that

he'd been wasting his time and trouble on a false track, and that he should give the matter up. Sawney Tom received this announcement with a great deal of champing and working of the jaws, and with rather a doubtful expression in his dull red eyes; but he accepted the payment which his employer offered him, and agreed to depart for London by the ten-o'clock train.

"And whatever I do henceforth in this business I do single-handed," Mr. Carter said to himself, as he turned his back upon his companion.

At five o'clock that afternoon the detective found himself at the Shorncliffe station, where he hired a fly, and drove on post-haste to Lisford cottage.

The neat little habitation of the late naval commander looked pretty much as Mr. Carter had seen it last, except that in one of the upper windows there was a bill—a large paper placard—announcing that this house was to let, furnished; and that all information respecting the same was to be obtained of Mr. Hogson, grocer, Lisford.

Mr. Carter gave a long whistle.

“The bird’s flown,” he muttered. “It wasn’t likely he’d stop here to be caught.”

The detective rang the bell ; once, twice, three times ; but there was no answer to the summons. He ran round the low garden fence to the back of the premises, where there was a little wooden gate, padlocked, but so low that he vaulted over it easily, and went in amongst the budding currant-bushes, the neat gravel paths and strawberry-beds, that had been erst so cherished by the naval commander. Mr. Carter peered in at the back windows of the house, and through the little casement he saw a vista of emptiness. He listened, but there was no sound of voices or footsteps. The blinds were undrawn, and he could see the bare walls of the rooms, the fireless grates, and that cold bleakness of aspect peculiar to an untenanted habitation.

He gave a low groan.

“Gone,” he muttered ; “gone as neat as ever a man went yet.”

He ran back to the fly, and drove to the es-

tablishment of Mr. Hogson, grocer and general dealer—the shop of the village of Lisford.

Here Mr. Carter was informed that the key of Woodbine Cottage had been given up on the evening of that very day on which he had seen Joseph Wilmot sitting in the little parlour.

“Yes, sir, it were the night before the last,” Mr. Hogson said; “it were the night before last as a young woman, wrapped up about the face like, and dressed very plain, got out of a fly at my door; and, says she, ‘Would you please take charge of this here key, and be so kind as to show any one over the cottage as would like to see it, which of course the commission is understood?—for my master is leaving for some time on account of having a son just come home from India, which is married and settled in Devonshire, and my master is going there to see him, not having seen him this many a long year.’ She was a very civil-spoken young woman, and Woodbine Cottage has been good customers to us, both with the old tenants and the new; so of course I took the key, willin’ to do any service as lay

in my power. And if you'd like to see the cottage, sir—"

"You're very good," said Mr. Carter, with something like a groan. "No, I won't see the cottage to-night. What time was it when the fly stopped at your door?"

"Between seven and eight."

"Between seven and eight. Just in time to catch the mail from Rugby. Was it one of the Rose-and-Crown flies, d'ye think?"

"Oh, yes, the fly belonged to Lisford. I'm sure of that, for Tim Baling was drivin' it and wished me good night."

Mr. Carter left the Lisford emporium, and ran over to the Rose and Crown, where he saw the man who had driven him to Shorncliffe station. This man told the detective that he had been fetched in the evening by the same young woman who fetched him in the morning, and that he had driven another gentleman, who walked lame like the first, and had his head and face wrapped up a deal, not to Shorncliffe station, but to Little Petherington station, six miles on the Rugby side



of Shorncliffe, where the gentleman and the young woman who was with him got into a second-class carriage in the slow train for Rugby. The gentleman had said, laughing, that the young woman was his housemaid, and he was taking her up to town on purpose to be married to her. He was a very pleasant-spoken gentleman, the flyman added, and paid uncommon liberal.

“I daresay he did,” muttered Mr. Carter.

He gave the man a shilling for his information, and went back to the fly that had brought him to the station. It was getting on for seven o'clock by this time, and Joseph Wilmot had had eight-and-forty hours' start of him. The detective was quite down-hearted now.

He went up to London by the same train which he had every reason to suppose had carried Joseph Wilmot and his daughter two nights before, and at the Euston terminus he worked very hard on that night and on the following day to trace the missing man. But Joseph Wilmot was only a drop in the great ocean of London life. The train that was supposed to have brought

him to town was a long train, coming through from the north. Half-a-dozen lame men with half-a-dozen young women for their companions might have passed unnoticed in the bustle and confusion of the arrival platform.

Mr. Carter questioned the guards, the ticket-collectors, the porters, the cabmen; but not one among them gave him the least scrap of available information. He went away to Scotland Yard despairing, and laid his case before the authorities there.

“There’s only one way of having him,” he said, “and that’s the diamonds. From what I can make out, he had no money with him, and in that case he’ll be trying to turn some of those diamonds into cash.”

The following advertisement appeared in the supplement to the *Times* for the next day:

*“To Pawnbrokers and Others.—A liberal reward will be given to any person affording information that may lead to the apprehension of a tall man, walking lame, who is known to have a large quantity of unset diamonds in his possession, and*

*who most likely has attempted to dispose of the same."*

But this advertisement remained unanswered.

"They're too clever for us, sir," Mr. Carter remarked to one of the Scotland-Yard officials. "Whoever Joseph Wilmot may have sold those diamonds to has got a good bargain, you may depend upon it, and means to stick to it. The pawnbrokers and others think our advertisement a plant, you may depend upon it."

## CHAPTER XII.

### CLEMENT'S STORY.—BEFORE THE DAWN.

“I WENT back to my mother's house a broken and a disappointed man. I had solved the mystery of Margaret's conduct, and at the same time had set a barrier between myself and the woman I loved.

“Was there any hope that she would ever be my wife? Reason told me that there was none. In her eyes I must henceforth appear the man who had voluntarily set himself to work to discover her father's guilt, and track him to the gallows.

“*Could* she ever again love me with this knowledge in her mind? Could she ever again look me in the face, and smile at me, remembering this? The very sound of my name must in future be hateful to her.

“I knew the strength of my noble girl's love for that reprobate father. I had seen the force of that affection tested by so many cruel trials.

I had witnessed my poor girl's passionate grief at Joseph Wilmot's supposed death: and I had seen all the intensity of her anguish when the secret of his existence, which was at the same time the secret of his guilt, became known to her.

“ ‘She renounced me then, rather than renounce that guilty wretch,’ I thought; ‘she will hate me now that I have been the means of bringing his most hideous crime to light.’

“ ‘Yes, the crime was hideous—almost unparalleled in horror. The treachery which had lured the victim to his death seemed almost less horrible than the diabolical art which had fixed upon the name of the murdered man the black stigma of a suspected crime.

“ ‘But I knew too well that, in all the blackness of his guilt, Margaret Wilmot would cling to her father as truly, as tenderly, as she had clung to him in those early days when the suspicion of his worthlessness had been only a dark shadow for ever brooding between the man and his only child. I knew this, and I had no hope that she would ever forgive me for my part in the weav-

ing of that strange chain of evidence which made the condemnation of Joseph Wilmot.

“These were the thoughts that tormented me during the first fortnight after my return from the miserable journey to Winchester; these were the thoughts for ever revolving in my tired brain while I waited for tidings from the detective.

“During all that time it never once occurred to me that there was any chance, however remote, of Joseph Wilmot's escape from his pursuer.

“I had seen the science of the detective police so invariably triumphant over the best-planned schemes of the most audacious criminals, that I should have considered—had I ever debated the question, which I never did—Joseph Wilmot's evasion of justice an actual impossibility. It was most likely that he would be taken at Maudesley Abbey entirely unprepared, in his ignorance of the fatal discovery at Winchester; an easy prey to the experienced detective.

“Indeed, I thought that his immediate arrest was almost a certainty; and every morning, when I took up the papers, I expected to see a promi-

ment announcement to the effect that the long-undiscovered Winchester mystery was at last solved, and that the murderer had been taken by one of the detective police.

“But the papers gave no tidings of Joseph Wilmot; and I was surprised, at the end of a week’s time, to read the account of a detective’s skirmish on board a schooner some miles off Hull, which had resulted in the drowning of one Stephen Vallance, an old offender. The detective’s name was given as Henry Carter. Were there two Henry Carters in the small band of London detective police? or was it possible that my Henry Carter could have given up so profitable a prize as Joseph Wilmot in order to pursue unknown criminals upon the high seas? A week after I had read of this mysterious adventure, Mr. Carter made his appearance at Clapham, very grave of aspect and dejected of manner.

“‘It’s no use, sir,’ he said; ‘it’s humiliating to an officer of my standing in the force; but I’d better confess it freely. I’ve been sold, sir—sold by a young woman too, which makes it three



times as mortifying, and a kind of insult to the male sex in general !’

“ My heart gave a great throb.

“ ‘ Do you mean that Joseph Wilmot has escaped ?’ I asked.

“ ‘ He has, sir ; as clean as ever a man escaped yet. He hasn’t left this country, not to my belief, for I’ve been running up and down between the different outports like mad. But what of that ? If he hasn’t left the country, and if he doesn’t mean to leave the country, so much the better for him, and so much the worse for those that want to catch him. It’s trying to leave England that brings most of ’em to grief, and Joseph Wilmot’s an old enough hand to know that. I’ll wager he’s living as quiet and respectable as any gentleman ever lived yet.’

“ Mr. Carter went on to tell me the whole story of his disappointments and mortifications. I could understand all now : the moonlit figure in the Winchester street, the dusky shadow beneath the dripping branches in the grove. I could understand all now, my poor girl—my poor, brave girl.

“When I was alone, I rendered up my thanks to Heaven for the escape of Joseph Wilmot. I had done nothing to impede the course of justice, though I had known full well that the punishment of the evil-doer would crush the bravest and purest heart that ever beat in an innocent woman’s bosom. I had not dared to attempt any interposition between Joseph Wilmot and the punishment of his crime; but I was, nevertheless, most heartily thankful that Providence had suffered him to escape that hideous earthly doom which is supposed to be the wisest means of ridding society of a wretch.

“But for the wretch himself, surely long years of penitence must make a better expiation of his guilt than that one short agony—those few spasmodic throes, which render his death such a pleasant spectacle for a sight-seeing populace.

“I was glad for the sake of the guilty and miserable creature himself that Joseph Wilmot had escaped. I was still gladder for the sake of that dear hope which was more to me than any hope on earth, the hope of making Margaret my wife.

“‘There will be no hideous recollection interwoven with my image now,’ I thought; ‘she will forgive me when I tell her the history of my journey to Winchester. She will let me take her away from the companionship that must be loathsome to her, in spite of her devotion. She will let me bring her to a happy home as my cherished wife.’

“I thought this, and then in the next moment I feared that Margaret might cling persistently to the dreadful duty of her life—the duty of shielding and protecting a criminal; the duty of teaching a wicked man to repent of his sins.

“I inserted an advertisement in the *Times* newspaper, assuring Margaret of my unalterable love and devotion, which no circumstances could lessen, and imploring her to write to me. Of course the advertisement was so worded as to give no clue to the identity of the person to whom it was addressed. The acutest official in Scotland Yard could have gathered nothing from the lines ‘From C. to M.,’ so like other appeals made through the same medium.

“But my advertisement remained unanswered—no letter came from Margaret.

“The weeks and months crept slowly past. The story of the evidence of the clothes found at Winchester was made public, together with the history of Joseph Wilmot’s flight and escape. The business created a considerable sensation, and Lord Herriston himself went down to Winchester to witness the exhumation of the remains of the man who had been buried under the name of Joseph Wilmot.

“The dead man’s face was no longer recognisable; but beside the little finger of the left hand there lay a ring—a slender ring of twisted gold, mixed with hair—an insignificant little ring, which had attracted no attention at the inquest. But Lord Herriston declared it to be of Indian workmanship, and swore to having seen it frequently on the hand of Henry Dunbar. This was not all: inside the ring there was an inscription, minutely engraved—‘In memory of the beloved wife of Henry Dunbar.’ The hair, so faded now, had belonged to Laura’s mother.

“The remains were removed from Winchester

to Lisford Church, where Percival Dunbar was buried in a vault beneath the chancel. The murdered man's coffin was placed beside that of his father, and a simple marble tablet recording the untimely death of Henry Dunbar, cruelly and treacherously assassinated in a grove near Winchester, was erected by order of Lady Jocelyn, who was abroad with her husband when the story of her father's death was revealed to her.

“The weeks and months crept by. The revelation of Joseph Wilmot's guilt left me free to return to my old position in the house of Dunbar, Dunbar, and Balderby. But I had no heart to go back to the old business now the hope that had made my commonplace city life so bright seemed for ever broken. I was surprised, however, into a confession of the truth by the good-natured junior partner, who lived near us on Clapham Common, and who dropped in sometimes as he went by my mother's gate, to while away an idle half hour in some political discussion.

“He insisted upon my returning to the office directly he heard the secret of my resignation.

The business was now entirely his ; for there had been no one to succeed Henry Dunbar, and Mr. John Lovell had sold the dead man's interest on behalf of his client, Lady Jocelyn. I went back to my old post, but not to remain long in my old position ; for a week after my return Mr. Balderby made me an offer which I considered as generous as it was flattering, and which I ultimately and somewhat reluctantly accepted.

“ By means of this new and most liberal arrangement, which demanded from me a very moderate amount of capital, I became junior partner in the firm, which was now conducted under the names of Dunbar, Dunbar, Balderby, and Austin. The double Dunbar was still essential to us, though the last of the male Dunbars was dead and buried under the chancel of Lisford Church. The old name was the legitimate stamp of our dignity as one of the oldest Anglo-Indian banking firms in the city of London.

“ My new life was smooth enough, and there was so much business to be got through, so much responsibility vested in my hands—for Mr. Bal-

derby was getting fat and lazy, as regarded affairs in the City, though untiring in the production of more forced pine-apples and hot-house grapes than he could consume or give away—that I had not much leisure in which to think of the one sorrow of my life. A City man may break his heart for disappointed love, but he must do it out of business hours if he pretends to be an honourable man: for every sorrowful thought which wanders to the loved and lost is a separate treason against the ‘house’ he serves.

“Smoking my after-dinner cigar in the narrow pathways and miniature shrubberies of my mother’s garden, I could venture to think of my lost Margaret: and I did think of her, and pray for her with as fervent aspirations as ever rose from a man’s faithful heart. And in the dusky stillness of the evening, with the faint odour of dewy flowers round me, and distant stars shining dimly in that far-off opal sky, against which the branches of the elms looked so black and dense, I used to beguile myself—or it may be that the influence of the scene and hour beguiled me—



into the thought that my separation from Margaret could be only a temporary one. We loved each other so truly! And, after all, what under heaven is stronger than love? I thought of my poor girl in some lonely, melancholy place, hiding with her guilty father; in daily companionship with a miserable wretch, whose life must be made hideous to himself by the memory of his crime. I thought of the self-abnegation, the heroic devotion which made Margaret strong enough to endure such an existence as this: and out of my belief in the justice of Heaven there grew up in my mind the faith in a happier life in store for my noble girl.

“My mother supported me in this faith. She knew all Margaret’s story now, and she sympathised with my love and admiration for Joseph Wilmot’s daughter. A woman’s heart must have been something less than womanly if it could have failed to appreciate my darling’s devotion: and my mother was about the last of womankind to be wanting in tenderness and compassion for any one who had need of her pity and was worthy of her love.

“So we both cherished the thought of the absent girl in our minds, talking of her constantly on quiet evenings, when we sat opposite to each other in the snug lamp-lit drawing-room, unhindered by the presence of guests. We did not live by any means a secluded or gloomy life, for my mother was fond of pleasant society: and I was quite as true to Margaret while associating with agreeable people, and hearing cheerful voices buzzing round me, as I could have been in a hermitage whose stillness was only broken by the howling of the storm.

“It was in the dreariest part of the winter which followed Joseph Wilmot's escape that an incident occurred which gave me a strangely-mingled feeling of pleasure and pain. I was sitting one evening in my mother's breakfast-parlour—a little room situated close to the hall-door—when I heard the ringing of the bell at the garden-gate. It was nine o'clock at night, a bitter wintry night, in which I should least have expected any visitor. So I went on reading my paper while my mother speculated about the matter.

“Three minutes after the bell had rung our parlour-maid came into the room, and placed something on the table before me.

“‘A parcel, sir,’ she said, lingering a little; perhaps in the hope that in my eager curiosity I might immediately open the packet, and give her an opportunity of satisfying her own desire for information.

“I put aside my newspaper, and looked down at the object before me.

“Yes, it was a parcel—a small oblong box—about the size of those pasteboard receptacles which are usually associated with Seidlitz powders—an oblong box, neatly packed in white paper, secured with several seals, and addressed to Clement Austin, Esq., Willow Bank, Clapham.

“But the hand, the dear, well-known hand which had addressed the packet—my blood thrilled through my veins as I recognised the familiar characters.

“‘Who brought this parcel?’ I asked, starting from my comfortable easy-chair, and going straight out into the hall.

“The astonished parlour-maid told me that the packet had been given her by a lady, ‘a lady who was dressed in black, or dark things,’ the girl said, ‘and whose face was quite hidden by a thick veil.’ After leaving the small packet, this lady got into a cab a few paces from our gate, the girl added, ‘and the cab had tore off as fast as it could tear!’

“I went out into the open road, and looked despairingly London-wards. There was no vestige of any cab: of course there had been ample time for the cab in question to get far beyond reach of pursuit. I felt almost maddened with this disappointment and vexation. It was Margaret, Margaret herself most likely, who had come to my door; and I had lost the opportunity of seeing her.

“I stood staring blankly up and down the road for some time, and then went back to the parlour, where my mother, with pardonable weakness, had pounced upon the packet, and was examining it with eyes opened to their widest extent.

“‘It is Margaret’s hand!’ she exclaimed. ‘Oh, do open—do, please, open it directly. What on earth can it be?’

“I tore off the white-paper covering, and revealed just such an object as I had expected to see—a box, a commonplace pasteboard box, tied securely across and across with thin twine. I cut the twine and opened the box. At the top there was a layer of jeweler’s wool, and on that being removed my mother gave a little shriek of surprise and admiration.

“The box contained a fortune—a fortune in the shape of unset diamonds, lying as close together as their nature would admit—unset diamonds, which glittered and flashed upon us in the lamplight.

Inside the lid there was a folded paper, upon which the following lines were written in the dear hand, the never-to-be-forgotten hand :

“‘EVER-DEAREST CLEMENT,—*The sad and miserable secret which led to our parting is a secret no longer. You know all, and you have no doubt forgiven, and perhaps in part forgotten, the wretched woman to whom your love was once so dear, and to whom the memory of your love will ever be a consolation and a happiness. If I dared to pray you to think pitifully of that*

*most unhappy man whose secret is now known to you, I would do so; but I cannot hope for so much mercy from men: I can only hope it from God, who in His supreme wisdom alone can fathom the mysteries of a repentant heart. I beg of you to deliver to Lady Jocelyn the diamonds I place in your hands. They belong of right to her; and I regret to say they only represent a part of the money withdrawn from the funds in the name of Henry Dunbar. Good-by, dear and generous friend; this is the last you will ever hear of one whose name must sound odious to the ears of honest men. Pity me, and forget me; and may a happier woman be to you that which I can never be.*

*M. W.'*

“This was all. Nothing could be firmer than the tone of this letter, in spite of its pensive gentleness. My poor girl could not be brought to believe that I should hold it no disgrace to make her my wife, in spite of the hideous story connected with her name. In my vexation and disappointment, I appealed once

more to the unfailing friend of parted or persecuted lovers, the Jupiter of Printing-House Square.

“‘*Margaret,*’ I wrote, in the advertisement which adorned the second column of the *Times* supplement on twenty consecutive occasions, ‘*I hold you to your old promise, and consider the circumstances of our parting as in no manner a release from your old engagement. The greatest wrong you can inflict upon me will be inflicted by your desertion.*’

C. A.’

“This advertisement was as useless as its predecessor. I looked in vain for any answer.

“I lost no time in fulfilling the commission intrusted to me. I went down to Shorncliffe and delivered the box of diamonds into the hands of John Lovell, the solicitor; for Lady Jocelyn was still on the Continent. He packed the box in paper, and made me seal it with my signet-ring, in the presence of one of his clerks, before he put it away in an iron safe near his desk.

“When this was done, and when the *Times* advertisement had been inserted for the twentieth time without eliciting any reply, I gave myself



up to a kind of despair about Margaret. She had failed to see my advertisement, I thought; for she would scarcely have been so hard-hearted as to leave it unanswered. She had failed to see this advertisement, as well as the previous appeal made to her through the same medium, and she would no doubt fail to see any other. I had reason to know that she was, or had been, in England, for she would scarcely have intrusted the diamonds to strange hands; but it was only too likely that she had chosen the very eve of her own and her father's departure for some distant country as the most fitting time at which to leave the valuable parcel with me.

“‘Her influence over her father must be complete,’ I thought, ‘or he would scarcely have consented to surrender such a treasure as the diamonds. He has most likely retained enough to pay the passage out to America for himself and Margaret; and my poor darling will wander with her wretched father into some remote corner of the United States, where she will be hidden from me for ever.’

“I remembered with unspeakable pain how wide the world was, and how easy it would be for the woman I loved to be for ever lost to me.

“I gave myself up to despair; it was not resignation, for my life was empty and desolate without Margaret; try as I might to carry my burden quietly, and put a brave face upon my sorrow. Up to the time of Margaret’s appearance on that bleak winter’s night, I had cherished the hope—or even more than hope—the belief that we should be reunited: but after that night the old faith in a happy future crumbled away, and the idea that Joseph Wilmot’s daughter had left England grew little by little into conviction.

“I should never see her again. I fully believed this now. There was never to be any more sunshine in my life: and there was nothing for me to do but to resign myself to the even tenor of an existence in which the quiet duties of a business career would leave little time for any idle grief or lamentation. My sorrow was a part of my life: but even those who knew me best failed to fathom the depth of that sor-

row. To them I seemed only a grave business man, devoted to the dry details of a business life.

“Eighteen months had passed since the bleak winter's night on which the box of diamonds had been intrusted to me; eighteen months, so slow and quiet in their course that I was beginning to feel myself an old man, older than many old men, inasmuch as I had outlived the wreck of the one bright hope which had made life dear to me. It was midsummer time, and the counting-house in St. Gundolph Lane, and the parlour in which—in virtue of my new position—I had now a right to work, seemed peculiarly hot and frowsy, dusty and obnoxious. My work being especially hard at this time knocked me up; and I was compelled, under pain of solemn threats from my mother's pet medical attendant, to stay at home, and take two or three days' rest. I submitted very unwillingly; for, however dusty and stifling the atmosphere in St. Gundolph Lane might be, it was better to be there, victorious over my sorrow, by means of man's grandest ally in the

battle with black care—to wit, hard work—than to be lying on the sofa in my mother's pleasant drawing-room, listening to the cheery click of two knitting-needles, and thinking of my wasted life.

“I submitted, however, to take the three days' holiday; and on the second day, after a couple of hours' penance on the sofa, I got up, languid and tired still, but bent on some employment by which I might escape from the sad monotony of my own thoughts.

“‘I think I'll go into the next room and put my papers to rights, mother,’ I said.

“My dear indulgent mother remonstrated: I was to rest and keep myself quiet, she said, and not to worry myself about papers and tiresome things of that kind, which appertained only to the office. But I had my own way, and went into the little room, where there were flowers blooming and caged birds singing in the open window.

“This room was a sort of snuggerly, half library, half breakfast-parlour, and it was in this room my mother and I had been sitting on the

night on which the diamonds had been brought to me.

“On one side of the fire-place stood my mother's work-table, on the other the desk at which I wrote, whenever I wrote any letters at home—a ponderous old-fashioned office desk, with a row of drawers on each side, a deep well in the centre, and under that a large waste-paper basket full of old envelopes and torn scraps of letters.

“I wheeled a comfortable chair up to the desk, and began my task. It was a very long one, and involved a great deal of folding, sorting, and arranging of documents which, perhaps, were scarcely worth the trouble I took with them. At any rate, the work kept my fingers employed, though my mind still brooded over the old trouble.

“I sat for nearly three hours; for it was a very long time since I had had a day's leisure, and the accumulation of letters, bills, and receipts was something very formidable. At last all was done, the letters and bills were endorsed and

tied into neat packets that would have done credit to a lawyer's office, and I flung myself back in my chair with a sigh of relief.

“ But I had not finished my work yet ; for I drew out the waste-paper basket presently, and emptied its contents upon the floor, in order that I might make sure of there being no important paper thrown by chance amongst them, before I consigned them to be swept away by the housemaid.

“ I tossed over the chaotic fragments, the soiled envelopes, the circulars of enterprising Clapham tradesmen, and all the other rubbish that had accumulated within the last two years. The dust floated up to my face and almost blinded me.

“ Yes, there was something of consequence amongst the papers—something, at least, which I should have held it sacrilegious to consign to Molly the housemaid—the wrapper of the box containing the diamonds; the paper wrapper directed in the dear hand I loved, the hand of Margaret Wilmot.

“I must have left the wrapper on the table on the night when I received the box, and one of the servants had no doubt put it into the waste-paper basket. I picked up the sheet of paper and folded it neatly; it was a very small treasure for a lover to preserve, perhaps: but then I had so few relics of the woman who was to have been my wife.

“As I folded the paper, I looked, half in absence of mind, at the stamp in the corner. It was an old-fashioned sheet of Bath-post, stamped with the name of the stationer who had sold it—Jakins, Kylmington. Kylmington; yes, I remembered there was a town in Hampshire,—a kind of watering-place, I believed,—called Kylmington! And the paper had been bought there—and if so, it was more than likely that Margaret had been there.

“Could it be so? Could it be really possible that in this sheet of paper I had found a clue which would help me to trace my lost love? Could it be so? The new hope sent a thrill of sudden life and energy through my veins. Ill—



worn-out, knocked up by over-work? Who could dare to say I was any thing of the kind? I was as strong as Hercules.

“ I put the folded paper in the breast-pocket of my coat, and took down Bradshaw. Dear Bradshaw, what an interesting writer you seemed to me on that day! Yes, Kylmington was in Hampshire; three hours and a half from London, with due allowance for delays in changing carriages. There was a train would convey me from Waterloo to Kylmington that afternoon—a train that would leave Waterloo at half-past three.

“ I looked at my watch. It was half-past two. I had only an hour for all my preparations and the drive to Waterloo. I went to the drawing-room, where my mother was still sitting at work near the open window. She started when she saw my face, for my new hope had given it a strange brightness.

“ ‘ Why, Clem,’ she said, ‘ you look as pleased as if you’d found some treasure among your papers.’

“ ‘I hope I have, mother. I hope and believe that I have found a clue that will enable me to trace Margaret.’

“ ‘You don’t mean it?’

“ ‘I’ve found the name of a town which I believe to be the place where she was staying before she brought those diamonds to me. I am going there to try and discover some tidings of her. I am going at once. Don’t look anxious, dear mother; the journey to Kylmington, and the hope that takes me there, will do me more good than all the drugs in Mr. Bainham’s surgery. Be my own dear indulgent mother as you have always been, and pack me a couple of clean shirts in a portmanteau. I shall come back to-morrow night, I daresay, as I’ve only three days’ leave of absence from the office.’

“ My mother, who had never in her life refused me anything, did not long oppose me to-day. A hansom cab rattled me off to the station; and at five minutes before the half hour I was on the platform, with my ticket for Kylmington in my pocket.”

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE DAWN.

“THE clock of Kylmington church, which was as much behind any other public timekeeper I had ever encountered as the town of Kylmington was behind any other town I had ever explored, struck eight as I opened the little wooden gate of the churchyard, and went into the shade of an avenue of stunted sycamores, which was supposed to be the chief glory of Kylmington.

“It was twenty minutes past eight by London time, and the summer sun had gone down, leaving all the low western sky bathed in vivid yellow light, which deepened into crimson as I watched it.

“I had been more than an hour and a half in Kylmington. I had taken some slight refreshment at the principal hotel—a queer, old-fashioned

place, with a ruinous, weedy appearance pervading it, and the impress of incurable melancholy stamped on the face of every scrap of rickety furniture and lopsided window-blind. I had taken some slight refreshment—to this hour I don't know *what* it was I ate upon that balmy summer evening, so entirely was my mind absorbed by that bright hope, which was growing brighter and brighter every moment. I had been to the stationer's shop, which still bore above its window the faded letters of the name 'Jakins,' though the last of the Jakinses had long left Kylmington. I had been to this shop, and from a good-natured but pensive matron I had heard tidings that made my bright hope a still brighter certainty.

"I began business by asking if there was any lady in Kylmington who gave lessons in music and singing.

"'Yes,' Mr. Jakins's successor told me, 'there were two music-mistresses in the town—one was Madame Carinda, who taught at Grove House, the fashionable ladies' school; the other was Miss Wilson, whose terms were lower than Madame Ca-

rinda's—though Madame wasn't a bit a foreigner except by name—and who was much respected in the town. Likewise her papa, which had been quite the gentleman, attending church twice every Sunday as regular as the day came round, and being quite a picture of respectability, with his venerable, pious-looking gray hair.

“ I gave a little start as I heard this.

“ ‘ Miss Wilson lived with her papa, did she ?’  
I asked.

“ ‘ Yes,’ the woman told me ; ‘ Miss Wilson had lived with her papa till the poor old gentleman’s death.’

“ ‘ Oh, he was dead, then ?’

“ ‘ Yes, Mr. Wilson had died in the previous December, of a kind of decline, fading away like, almost unbeknown ; and being, oh, so faithfully nursed and cared for by that blessed daughter of his. And people did say that he had once been very wealthy, and had lost his money in some speculation ; and the loss of it had preyed upon his mind, and he had fallen into a settled melancholy like, and was never seen to smile.’

“The woman opened a drawer as she talked to me, and, after turning over some papers, took out a card—a card with embossed edges, fly-spotted and dusty, and with a little faded blue ribbon attached to it—a card on which there was written, in the hand I knew so well, an announcement that Miss Wilson, of the Hermitage, would give instruction in music and singing for a guinea a quarter.

“I had been about to ask for a description of the young music-mistress, but I had no need to do so now.

“‘Miss Wilson *is* the young lady I wish to see,’ I said. ‘Will you direct me to the Hermitage? I will call there early to-morrow morning.’

“The proprietress of Jakins’s, who was, I daresay, something of a matchmaker, after the manner of all good-natured matrons, smiled significantly.

“‘I know where you could see Miss Wilson, nearer than the Hermitage,’ she said, ‘and sooner than to-morrow morning. She works very hard all day,—poor, dear, delicate-looking young thing;

but every evening, when it's tolerably fine, she goes to the churchyard. It's the only walk I've ever seen her take since her father's death. She goes past my window regular every night, just about when I'm shutting up, and from my door I can see her open the gate and go into the churchyard. It's a doleful walk to take alone at that time of the evening, to be sure, though some folks think it's the pleasantest walk in all Kylmington.'

"It was in consequence of this conversation that I found myself under the shadow of the trees while the Kylmington clock was striking eight.

"The churchyard was a square flat, surrounded on all sides by a low stone wall, beyond which the fields sloped down to the mouth of a river that widened into the sea at a little distance from Kylmington, but which hereabouts had a very dingy melancholy look when the tide was out, as it was to-night.

"There was no living creature except myself in the churchyard as I came out of the shadow of the trees on to the flat, where the grass



grew long amongst the unpretending headstones.

“ I looked at all the newest stones, till I came at last to one standing in the obscurest corner of the churchyard, almost hidden by the low wall.

“ There was a very brief inscription on this modest headstone ; but it was enough to tell me whose ashes lay buried under the spot on which I stood.

“ *To the memory of*

*J. W.*

*Who died December 19, 1853.*

*‘ Lord have mercy upon me, a sinner !’*

“ I was still looking at this brief memorial, when I heard a woman’s dress rustling upon the long rank grass, and turning suddenly, saw my darling coming towards me, very pale, very pensive, but with a kind of seraphic resignation upon her face which made her seem to me more beautiful than I had ever seen her before.

“ She started at seeing me, but did not faint. She only grew paler than she had been before,

and pressed her two hands on her breast, as if to still the sudden tumult of her heart.

“I made her take my arm and lean upon it, and we walked up and down the narrow path talking until the last low line of light faded out of the dusky sky.

“All that I could say to her was scarcely enough to shake her resolution—to uproot her conviction that her father’s guilt was an insurmountable barrier between us. But when I told her of my broken life—when, in the earnestness of my pleading, she perceived the proof of a constancy that no time could shake, I could see that she wavered.

“‘I only want you to be happy, Clement,’ she said. ‘My former life has been such an unhappy one, that I tremble at the thought of linking it to yours. The shame, Clement—think of *that*. How will you answer people when they ask you the name of your wife?’

“‘I will tell them that she has no name, but that which she has honoured by accepting from me. I will tell them that she is the

noblest and dearest of women, and that her history is a story of unparalleled virtue and devotion !’

“ I sent a telegraphic message to my mother early the next morning ; and in the afternoon the dear soul arrived at Kylmington to embrace her future daughter. We sat late in the little parlour of the Hermitage ; a very dreary cottage, looking out upon the flat shore, half sand, half mud, and the low water lying in greenish pools. Margaret told us of her father’s penitence.

“ ‘ No repentance was ever more sincere, Clement,’ she said, for she seemed afraid we should doubt the possibility of penitence in such a criminal as Joseph Wilmot. ‘ My poor father — my poor wronged, unhappy father ! — yes, wronged, Clement, you must not forget that ; you must never forget that in the first instance he was wronged, and deeply wronged, by the man who was murdered. When first we came here, his mind brooded upon that, and he seemed to look upon what he had done as an ignorant savage would look upon the vengeance which

his heathenish creed had taught him to consider a justifiable act of retaliation. Little by little I won my poor father away from such thoughts as these : till by and by he grew to think of Henry Dunbar as he was when they were young men together, linked by a kind of friendship, before the forging of the bills, and all the trouble that followed. He thought of his old master, as he knew him first, and his heart was softened towards the dead man's memory ; and from that time his penitence began. He was sorry for what he had done. No words can describe that sorrow, Clement : and may you never have to watch, as I have watched, the anguish of a guilty soul ! Heaven is very merciful. If my father had failed to escape, and had been hung, he would have died hardened and impenitent. God had compassion on him, and gave him time to repent.' "

*(The end of the story.)*

THE EPILOGUE : ADDED BY CLEMENT AUSTIN SEVEN  
YEARS AFTERWARDS.

“My wife and I are at Maudesley Abbey with our two children, on a visit to Sir Philip and Lady Jocelyn, who oscillate between the Rock and the Abbey when they are in Warwickshire. Lady Jocelyn has taken a wonderful liking to my wife, in utter ignorance of her unhappy history. She is a beautiful woman, frank, generous, noble-hearted, beloved by every creature within twenty miles’ radius of her home, and idolised by her husband. I see her from the window of my room as I write this, sitting under the oldest and grandest of the cedars, with her two-months-old baby in her arms.

“My wife is sitting next her; and young Philip Jocelyn, who is home from Eton for the summer vacation, is leading his pony up and down the lawn, to the delight of my chubby

five-year-old son and heir, who is having what he calls a 'wide.'

"We are very happy. No prying eye would ever read in Margaret's bright face the sad story of her early life. A new existence has begun for her as wife and mother. She has little time to think of that miserable past; and none of the Maudesley servants who wait on the beautiful young matron have the faintest suspicion that they are serving the daughter of Henry Dunbar's murderer, the false master of the Abbey.

"We are very happy. The secret of my wife's history is hidden in our own breasts—a dark chapter in the criminal romance of life, never to be revealed upon earth. The Winchester murder is forgotten amongst the many other guilty mysteries which are never entirely solved. If Joseph Wilmot's name is ever mentioned, people suggest that he went to America; indeed, there are people who go further, and say they have seen him in America.

"My mother keeps house for us; and in very

nearly seven years' experience we have never found any disunion to arise from this arrangement. The pretty Clapham villa is gay with the sound of children's voices, and the shrill carol of singing birds, and the joyous barking of Skye terriers. We have added a nursery wing already to one side of the house, and have balanced it on the other by a vinery, built after the model of those which adorn the mansion of my senior. The Misses Balderby have taken what they call a 'great fancy' to my wife, and they swarm over our drawing-room carpets in blue or pink flounces very often, on what they call 'social evenings, for a little music.' I find that a little music is only a synonyme with the Misses Balderby for a great deal of noise.

"I love my wife's playing best, though they are kind enough to perform twenty-page compositions by Bach and Mendelssohn for my amusement: and I am never happier than on those dusky summer evenings when we sit alone together in the shadowy drawing-room, and talk



to each other, while Margaret's skilful fingers glide softly over the keys in wandering snatches of melody that melt and die away like the low breath of the summer wind."

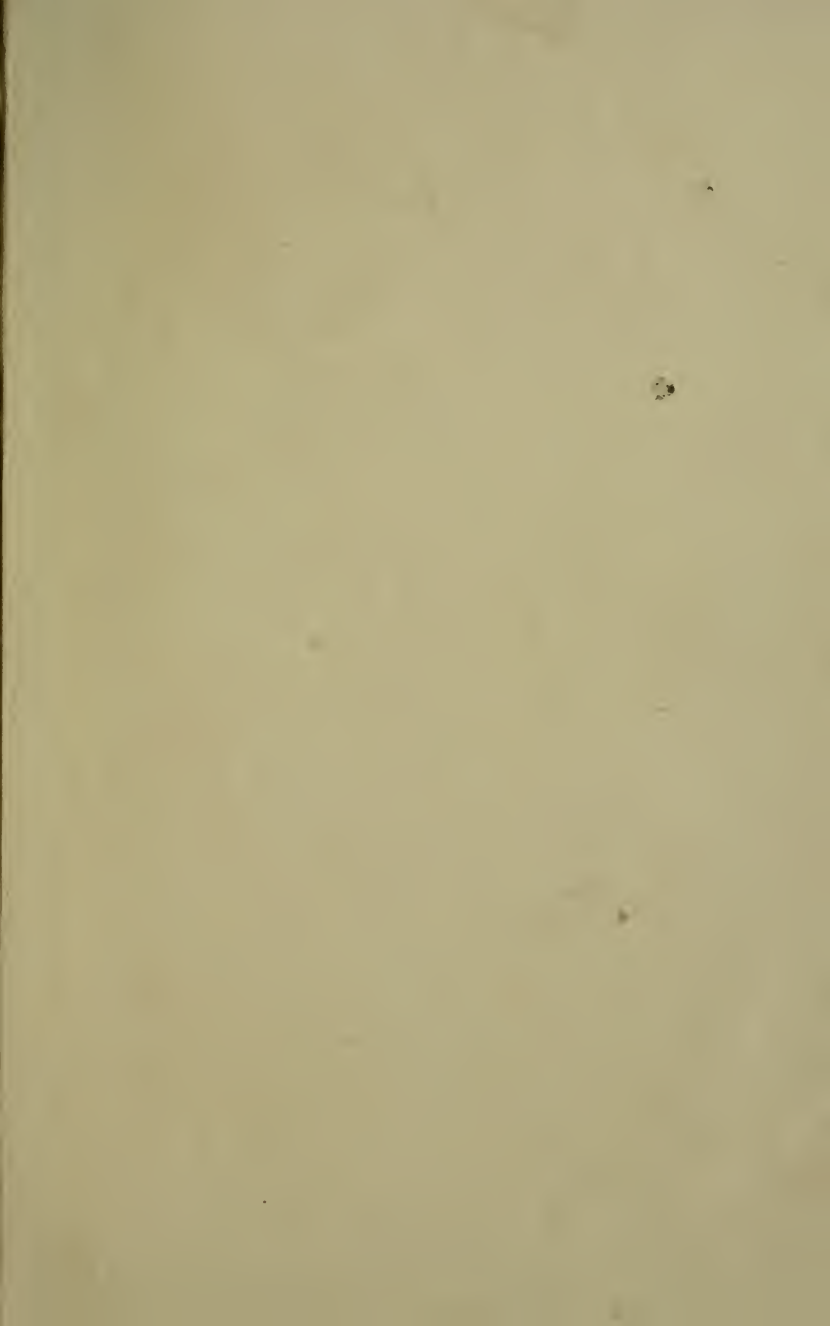
THE END.

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